

## J. Edgar Hoover and the Anti-interventionists



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FBI Political Surveillance and the Rise of the Domestic  
Security State, 1939–1945

**Douglas M. Charles**



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS • COLUMBUS

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Charles, Douglas M.

J. Edgar Hoover and the anti-interventionists : FBI political surveillance and the rise of the domestic security state, 1939–1945 / Douglas M. Charles.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-0-8142-1061-1 (cloth : alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 0-8142-1061-9 (cloth : alk. paper)

ISBN-13: 978-0-8142-9140-5 (cd-rom)

ISBN-10: 0-8142-9140-6 (cd-rom)

1. Hoover, J. Edgar (John Edgar), 1895–1972. 2. Roosevelt, Franklin D. (Franklin Delano), 1882–1945. 3. United States. Federal Bureau of Investigation—History. 4. World War, 1939–1945—United States. 5. Intelligence service—United States—History—20th century. 6. Internal security—United States—History—20th century. 7. Dissenters—Government policy—United States—History—20th century. 8. Neutrality—United States—History—20th century. 9. United States—History—1933–1945. 10. United States—Foreign relations—1933–1945—Public opinion. I. Title.  
HV8144.F43C43 2007  
940.53'160973—dc22

2006102680

Cover design by Janna Thompson-Chordas

Typeset in Adobe Minion Pro

Typesetting by Juliet Williams

Printed by Thomson-Shore

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of the American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials. ANSI Z39.48-1992.

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

For my parents, Jeannette and Daniel Charles



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is, indeed, a joy to thank those whose advice and support made working on this book a pleasurable experience. Throughout my education, and as this project developed, I've benefited from superb advising beginning with Robert Szymcak and John Paul Rossi (Pennsylvania State University), Athan Theoharis (Marquette University), and finally Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones and David Stafford (University of Edinburgh). I owe them all an inestimable debt of gratitude for their thoughtful direction, encouragement, and assistance. My research could never have been completed without generous financial assistance from the British Overseas Research Student Award Scheme, Edinburgh University, American Friends of Edinburgh University, the Roosevelt Study Center (Holland), Princeton University Library, the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, and the American Heritage Center of the University of Wyoming. I've also benefited from the selfless financial help and encouragement of my parents (Jeannette and Daniel), my grandparents who helped to spark my interest in history (Pauline & Lavern Blinn, Anne & Dan Charles), and my great aunts (Jeannette and Lil). Finally, I want to thank Sandy Crooms, Eugene O'Connor, and others on the staff of The Ohio State University Press who helped this project along and made the process an enjoyable one.

D.M.C.  
Erie, Pennsylvania  
February 2007



## INTRODUCTION

Between 1939 and 1945, as war ravaged Europe and Asia, J. Edgar Hoover's Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) monitored the political dissent of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's celebrated anti-interventionist foreign policy critics. This surveillance occurred as Americans popularly perceived a threat from a Nazi "Fifth Column," which was inflamed by sensational stories of German espionage, leading many otherwise rational citizens and government officials to suspect the motives of legitimate anti-interventionist foreign policy critics. More importantly, the bitter foreign policy debate over American involvement in war proved to be an opportunity for the bureaucrat Hoover who, as a conservative, did not fit the mold of the left-of-center Roosevelt administration. Hoover, therefore, skillfully used the opportunity to ingratiate himself with the Roosevelt administration by catering to the president's political and policy interests—in providing him detailed political intelligence on foreign policy critics—to demonstrate his worth to the administration, retain his tenure as FBI director, and secure increased authority and autonomy for his bureau. Among those critics he targeted were Charles Lindbergh, the America First Committee, notable senators and congressmen, elements of the anti-interventionist press, and other leading figures in the anti-interventionist movement. Throughout, Roosevelt valued these reports and made no complaints about the impropriety or civil liberties violations of J. Edgar Hoover's actions.

It was during this period, moreover, when Hoover's FBI first used its resources in an expansive way to monitor, provide intelligence, and discredit an administration's political opposition. But while the FBI extensively monitored administration opposition as it never had previously, compared to the Cold War era—where Hoover operated autonomously—the extent of the FBI's activity was more defined. Whereas, by 1957, the

Cold War FBI had abandoned prosecutions in favor of secret and illegal programs (the COINTELPROS) to disrupt and contain its targets, the FBI during the 1939–45 period consigned itself to the collection and dissemination of political intelligence and worked to silence administration critics by developing legal cases—utilizing the Smith Act, Foreign Agents Registration Act, conspiracy statutes, and (during wartime) the Espionage Act<sup>1</sup>—or by initiating grand jury proceedings that, while nominally secret, might have discredited opposition efforts by casting doubt on their legitimacy. This activity suggests that the FBI's role in the later national security state, executed while America advocated an activist foreign policy and deferred to executive authority, lies in the prewar foreign policy debate (the so-called Great Debate) where a hidden agenda lay behind interventionist policy and where patterns of FBI behavior mirror those of the Cold War and national security state period.

Further highlighting the development of the FBI as a national security apparatus, dating from 1940 it established a formal relationship with British intelligence. Like Hoover and Roosevelt, the British had a vested interest in the political activities of the anti-interventionists. Whereas Hoover sought to develop legal cases against them, collect derogatory intelligence, and provide the White House with political intelligence that alluded to its critics' subversiveness, British intelligence sought to hasten American entry into the war by disrupting and discrediting these foreign policy critics. The relationship between the FBI and British intelligence, which had existed on an ad hoc basis dating from the First World War, was made permanent from 1940 and continued to grow, extending into the Cold War years. While the exact scope and nature of the two organizations' relationship cannot be ascertained fully owing to classification restrictions on relevant documents, nevertheless it is clear that the two maintained close ties. The closeness, origins, and development of the relationship, moreover, demonstrates that the FBI's international role in the later national security state—where the FBI cooperated intimately with Allied foreign intelligence agencies—had its origins during the Great Debate of 1940–41.

That Hoover was limited to the above tactics during the Great Debate can be understood if we recognize that he did not yet have the level of

1. The Smith Act of 28 June 1940 prohibited any individual or organization from advocating the violent overthrow of the United States government or membership with a group advocating such an action. The 1940 Foreign Agents Registration Act (amended from the 1938 version) required all foreign-controlled groups to register with the Justice Department.

autonomy that he would during the Cold War, though he did have a greater level of autonomy than at any previous time. Without complete assurance that intrusive programs would never be discovered, and until his position as FBI director was firmly rooted with ideological allies in the White House or Congress—something Hoover did not develop until the Cold War—Hoover refused to employ such methods, remembering the effects wrought on the Bureau of Investigation from discovery of other illegal tactics employed during the 1919–20 Red Scare. These concerns were reflected in Hoover's repeated efforts to counter *any* criticism that FBI agents were involved in illegal activity and his public denials that the FBI collected noncriminal information during the Great Debate. The fact of the matter, however, is that FBI agents had indeed employed illegal surveillance tactics and actively sought noncriminal intelligence on the anti-interventionists for bureaucratic and political purposes.

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Further characterizing this period, the FBI director demonstrated that he was, above all, a pragmatic bureaucrat. Beginning with the Coolidge administration in 1924, Hoover made himself valuable to each succeeding administration by providing information he thought each would find useful. Hoover was successful inasmuch as he held onto his high position in government longer than any comparable figure in American history—he was FBI director from 1924 until his death in 1972, nearly fifty years. This pragmatism is significant when one examines the bureau in the context of the New Deal era. Generally regarded as a watershed in the development of the welfare state, the New Deal reflected the precept of “big government” staffed by left-of-center politicians seeking proactive leadership in Washington. While on the surface it seems the political views of New Dealers and J. Edgar Hoover would be at odds, the FBI director thrived during the Roosevelt administration. He succeeded in cultivating a close relationship with Roosevelt by using his pragmatism to manipulate the relationship between the president and the FBI. Hoover became a valued source of information on Roosevelt's political enemies and useful in occasional attempts to undermine them. For Roosevelt's part, his long personal interest in secret intelligence, in part, explains his receptiveness to Hoover's political intelligence reports.<sup>2</sup>

2. On Roosevelt's fascination with intelligence see David Stafford, *Roosevelt and Churchill: Men of Secrets* (London: Little, Brown, and Co., 1999), 3–12.

Hoover's pragmatism during this period, however, must also be analyzed within the framework of the correlation between international crisis and growth of power. Hoover's ability to increase FBI authority has, for the most part, been associated with some concomitant international crisis. More basically, the charged atmosphere created by various international crises resulted in fears of domestic unrest, whether during the First World War, Red Scare, Great Depression, Second World War, Cold War, or War on Terrorism. In each period, the FBI's power and authority increased, for different reasons, to deal with a perceived domestic threat. During the Great Debate of 1940–41, foreign policy issues provided the impetus for extensive FBI monitoring of White House foreign policy critics who were popularly regarded as subversive.<sup>3</sup> This all took place in the context of a charged international situation that permitted Hoover to cater to President Roosevelt's domestic political concerns about overcoming his anti-interventionist opposition. Throughout the period, Hoover garnered increased authority and autonomy for his FBI. From this basis, the Cold War FBI was able to evolve into an even more intrusive *national* security apparatus.

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Contemporaries and historians have popularly dubbed Roosevelt's foreign policy critics during this period "isolationists." The term "anti-interventionist," however, will be employed throughout this study. The word "isolationist" is too narrow a descriptor to be applied to Roosevelt's foreign policy critics who did not advocate isolation from foreign affairs but unilateralism in American foreign relations. Moreover, anti-interventionists themselves never used the word "isolationist," preferring instead "anti-interventionist" or "noninterventionist." It was Roosevelt's interventionist allies who propagated—successfully—the derogatory and inaccurate term "isolationist."

While Franklin Roosevelt's anti-interventionist foreign policy opposition included elements from both ends of the political spectrum—from the mostly conservative America First Committee to the leftist American League for Peace and Democracy—this study focuses on his mostly conservative and prominent critics who were associated with America First. (It also does not address those Americans who were caught up in FBI

3. On the interventionist perception of anti-interventionists as subversives see Mark Lincoln Chadwin, *The Hawks of World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968).

surveillance activities even though they were not anti-interventionists, as other historians have already documented.) Some nonconservatives are included but only inasmuch as they opposed the centralization of power in the presidency and allied themselves with America First. Anti-interventionists from other points on the political spectrum are excluded primarily for three reasons. First, those associated with the America First Committee were best organized and posed the most significant political threat to administration foreign policy. Second, after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, American leftists and Communists wholeheartedly joined the interventionist cause; thereafter America First remained the only serious threat to administration political interests.<sup>4</sup> Third, Hoover was a fervent anti-Communist with conservative political and social credentials, and his willingness to monitor those of similar political ilk for the left-of-center Roosevelt administration reveals his bureaucratic astuteness. Ever the master bureaucrat, Hoover realized his position in the Roosevelt administration was tenuous and sought to preserve and expand it by catering to the White House's political and policy interests vis-à-vis the anti-interventionists.

As Hoover was of the political right<sup>5</sup>—like many anti-interventionists, particularly those associated with the America First Committee—the question arises whether he considered himself an interventionist. While he did not publicly advocate American intervention in the war, there is some evidence demonstrating his interventionist credentials. But more important than whether Hoover was an interventionist was his pragmatic character, a man who worked to effect Roosevelt's political interests. Hoover, moreover, would likely have regarded anti-interventionists as “subversives” or “un-American” in part because of the popular associations many had made between anti-interventionists and radical or fascist elements. This followed a popular outlook dating from the 1930s, and extending into the early Cold War, that identified Stalinism and Nazism as essentially similar totalitarian regimes. Hoover may have held such views and, coupled with popular perceptions of anti-interventionists as witting or unwitting

4. The wartime alliance between the United States and the Soviet Union did not end in any way FBI surveillance of domestic communist and leftist activity. On the FBI's continued efforts in this area see Athan Theoharis, *Chasing Spies: How the FBI Failed in Counterintelligence But Promoted the Politics of McCarthyism in the Cold War Years* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002), 34–78.

5. Hoover was conservative both politically (though he never joined a political party) and socially. He was a strong anti-Communist and had the support of a large conservative constituency who, by the Cold War period, sought to dismantle the trappings of Roosevelt's New Deal. He was also a racist, sexist, and intolerant of homosexuality.

Nazi dupes, he may have regarded some fellow conservatives as domestic threats. His derogatory political reports to the White House only served to bolster this perception.<sup>6</sup>

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This book makes use of previously classified FBI files. Only in the last few years have the FBI files of Charles Lindbergh, the America First Committee, and other prominent anti-interventionists, for example, been available for research. As a result, previous discourses about the bureau's political surveillance during this period have been tentative and incomplete. Historians of anti-interventionism, furthermore, have either been only tangentially interested in FBI activity or have been unaware of intricate FBI programs, filing procedures, and vested FBI interests. Historians of the FBI, while not unaware of other periods, have been disproportionately interested in the agency's Red Scare days (1919–20) or its Cold War activities. Much has been missed through these oversights, particularly new information that reveals the true extent of FBI surveillance activity from 1939 to 1945 and the origins of the FBI's intimate international intelligence relationships. As a result, FBI political surveillance during this important period has never received the full treatment it deserves.

FBI files are the single most important source of information for this study. All bureau files created since 1924 have been retained by the FBI and are not deposited in the National Archives except for the J. Edgar Hoover Official and Confidential file in 2005. For over seventy years, FBI files have remained the preserve of FBI officials who have opened them to only a select number of "friendly" journalists.<sup>7</sup> Only when amendments were made in 1974 to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) did researchers have access to these important documents, but with access comes restriction. Exemptions to the FOIA include classified material, privacy-rights related information, and anything revealing FBI sources and methods. With FBI employees' subjective use of the black felt tip pen, researchers are presented with sometimes heavily censored documents. In addition, it

6. See Thomas R. Maddux, "Red Fascism, Brown Bolshevism: The American Image of Totalitarianism in the 1930s," *Historian* 40 (November 1977): 85–103; Les K. Adler and Thomas G. Paterson, "Red Fascism: The Merger of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia in the American Image of Totalitarianism, 1930s–1950s," *American Historical Review* 75 (April 1970): 1046–64.

7. See for example, Kenneth O'Reilly, "Friendly Journalists' Access to FBI Files," *USA Today* 109 (September 1980): 29–31.



is the responsibility of the requester to pay processing costs (at ten cents per page for files that can be thousands of pages long), which can become very expensive. Moreover, FBI understaffing and budgetary restrictions have created very long delays in the processing of requests (in 1996 the bureau averaged fifty requests per day). It is not uncommon to wait years for a single FOIA request to be finalized. Nevertheless, FBI records are a vital and important, if sometimes frustrating and tantalizing, source of information.<sup>8</sup>



This book makes historiographical contributions in three areas: the history of FBI political surveillance, the history of the anti-interventionist/interventionist foreign policy debate, and the history of the rise of the American national security state. Most historians of the FBI have focused either on its abuses during the Red Scare of 1919–20<sup>9</sup> or its political intelligence activities during the Cold War era.<sup>10</sup> Some FBI historians have examined the FBI's political surveillance of Roosevelt's anti-interventionist foreign policy critics, but only as a small part of larger studies. Athan Theoharis briefly mentioned the FBI's monitoring of anti-interventionists in his broad study *Spying on Americans* (1978), in his biography of FBI Director Hoover, *The Boss: J. Edgar Hoover and the Great American*

8. It literally takes years to win access to FBI files. FOIA requests are taken on a first-come, first-served basis. As of March 1999 (when my research was carried out), the FBI had a total of 8,500 requests pending, which required the review (and redaction) of an estimated 1.8 million pages. Letter, John M. Kelso Jr., FBI FOIA Section Chief, to Douglas M. Charles, 14 May 1999.

9. Robert K. Murray, *Red Scare: A Study in National Hysteria, 1919–1920* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955); William Preston Jr., *Aliens and Dissenters: Federal Suppression of Radicals, 1903–1933*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); David Williams, “Without Understanding: The FBI and Political Surveillance, 1908–1941” (Ph.D. diss., University of New Hampshire, 1981), 2. See also David Williams, “The Bureau of Investigation and Its Critics, 1919–1921: The Origins of Federal Political Surveillance,” *Journal of American History* 68 (December 1981): 560–79.

10. Athan Theoharis, *Spying on Americans: Political Surveillance from Hoover to the Huston Plan* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978); Frank J. Donner, *The Age of Surveillance: The Aims and Methods of America's Political Intelligence System* (New York: Knopf, 1980); Kenneth O'Reilly, *Hoover and the Un-Americans: The FBI, HUAC, and the Red Menace* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983); John Elliff, *The Reform of FBI Intelligence Operations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979); David Garrow, *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.: From Memphis to “Solo”* (New York: Norton, 1981); William Keller, *The Liberals and J. Edgar Hoover: Rise and Fall of a Domestic Intelligence State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989).

*Inquisition* (1988), and in his *The FBI and American Democracy: A Brief Critical History* (2004).<sup>11</sup> Likewise, both Richard Powers and Curt Gentry in their books mentioned but only in passing that the FBI had monitored Roosevelt's critics.<sup>12</sup>

Some historians of anti-interventionism and Roosevelt's foreign policy also have only sketchily examined the FBI's surveillance of anti-interventionists. Their interests have concentrated on the politics of anti-interventionism, and while recognizing FBI political surveillance perhaps have neglected it through a lack of documentation. Wayne S. Cole has studied anti-interventionists more than anyone else and in his magnum opus, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists* (1983), only briefly surveyed the FBI's surveillance.<sup>13</sup> In his book *Storm on the Horizon* (2000), Justus Doenecke briefly noted the FBI's efforts.<sup>14</sup> Robert Dallek's broad survey of Roosevelt's foreign policy, similar to Cole's and Doenecke's, offered only one passing reference to the FBI.<sup>15</sup>

A few historians, nevertheless, have examined the FBI's political surveillance of the anti-interventionists more directly than these broad studies. Richard W. Steele in his article "Franklin D. Roosevelt and His Foreign Policy Critics" (1979) attempted fuller coverage of FBI investigations into the anti-interventionists, but was limited by the inaccessibility (at the time) of FBI records. Steele focused on President Roosevelt and argued that he intentionally directed Hoover, citing his 1934 and 1936 directives, to investigate his anti-interventionist opponents in an effort to destroy them. As Steele's argument was based on only a limited number of FBI documents, Roosevelt papers, and congressional reports, he placed too much emphasis on Roosevelt's machinations as distinct from J. Edgar Hoover's own priorities. Steele did not widely examine FBI monitoring of anti-interventionists

11. Theoharis, *Spying on Americans*, 158–59; Athan Theoharis and John Cox, *The Boss: J. Edgar Hoover and the Great American Inquisition* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 149; Athan Theoharis, *The FBI and American Democracy: A Brief Critical History* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004)..

12. Richard Gid Powers, *Secrecy and Power: The Life of J. Edgar Hoover* (New York: Free Press, 1987); Powers, *Broken: The Troubled Past and Uncertain Future of the FBI* (New York: Free Press, 2004); Curt Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover: The Man and the Secrets* (New York: Norton, 1991).

13. Wayne S. Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists, 1932–45* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 484–87, 530–33.

14. Justus D. Doenecke, *Storm on the Horizon: The Challenge to American Intervention, 1939–1941* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 276.

15. Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 289–90.

and, because his documentation was limited, he focused more on the White House than the FBI.<sup>16</sup>

Charles Croog has analyzed the FBI's political surveillance of anti-interventionists in his article "FBI Political Surveillance and the Isolationist-Interventionist Debate, 1939–1941" (1992). Croog argued that Roosevelt and Hoover fully agreed upon the national security mission of the FBI and that the FBI's investigation of anti-interventionists was limited. In making this argument, Croog stated that FBI "resources were never significantly mobilized against Roosevelt's law-abiding opponents." Yet Croog's piece suffered from one major weakness. Like Steele, Croog employed only a limited base of evidence to support his conclusions: his footnotes show that he used only a portion of the America First Committee FBI file, congressional hearings, and reports. Croog thereby vastly underestimated the true extent and nature of FBI political surveillance.<sup>17</sup>

Kenneth O'Reilly examined the FBI's political surveillance of Roosevelt's foreign policy opponents in the context of the agency's New Deal expansion in his "A New Deal for the FBI: The Roosevelt Administration, Crime Control, and National Security" (1982). O'Reilly examined FBI institutional changes made during the New Deal in the areas of crime control and national security. While he used a broader base of evidence than previous historians, when analyzing the FBI's monitoring of foreign policy critics he nevertheless concluded, contrary to Steele, that "the Roosevelt administration's purposes were essentially benevolent."<sup>18</sup>

Athan Theoharis examined an aspect of the FBI's surveillance of the anti-interventionist press in his article "The FBI, the Roosevelt Administration, and the 'Subversive' Press" (1993). Making more extensive use of FBI files, Theoharis analyzed the FBI's monitoring of prominent members of the anti-interventionist press and the Roosevelt administration's desire to settle scores with them after the American entry into the Second World War. Theoharis concluded that a complete understanding of the episode could not be ascertained until further documentation was declassified.<sup>19</sup>

16. Richard W. Steele, "Franklin D. Roosevelt and His Foreign Policy Critics," *Political Science Quarterly* 94 (Spring 1979): 15–32. Arthur Schlesinger Jr. commented on Steele's piece, arguing that he had made overstatements, and claimed Steele's article read more like a prosecutorial brief than a historical assessment. See his "A Comment on 'Roosevelt and His Foreign Policy Critics,'" *Political Science Quarterly* 94 (Spring 1979): 33–35.

17. Charles F. Croog, "FBI Political Surveillance and the Isolationist-Interventionist Debate, 1939–1941," *Historian* 54 (Spring 1992): 441–58.

18. Kenneth O'Reilly, "A New Deal for the FBI: The Roosevelt Administration, Crime Control, and National Security," *Journal of American History* 69 (December 1982): 638–58.

19. Athan Theoharis, "The FBI, the Roosevelt Administration, and the 'Subversive'

My own articles on the FBI and the anti-interventionists, early results of my research, examined limited aspects of the FBI's political surveillance. In "FBI Political Surveillance and the Charles Lindbergh Investigation, 1939–1944" (1997), I argued that the FBI's investigative efforts against anti-interventionists, in particular Charles Lindbergh, were greater than previous historians had argued. Then, in "Informing FDR: FBI Political Surveillance and the Isolationist-Interventionist Foreign Policy Debate, 1939–1945" (2000), I furthered my argument by examining the FBI's monitoring of the America First Committee, Lindbergh, and five wiretap targets. I concluded that secret FBI political reports to the White House helped Roosevelt to advance his conception of the nation's national security interests.<sup>20</sup> And in "Franklin D. Roosevelt, J. Edgar Hoover, and FBI Political Surveillance" (1999), I argued for a lay audience that it was Hoover and not Roosevelt who initiated FBI monitoring of anti-interventionists, yet Roosevelt had made no complaints. These early conclusions were limited and served as a basis on which this present study was launched. Some aspects of my early work are expanded upon herein and more closely scrutinized.<sup>21</sup>

Other studies deal with the FBI and political surveillance during this period in indirect ways. Roy Turnbaugh argued in "The FBI and Harry Elmer Barnes" (1980) that the bureau targeted the anti-interventionist Barnes in an effort to exact vengeance for critical comments the noted historian had made about the FBI prior to the Great Debate. He did not analyze the FBI's monitoring of Barnes as part of a larger effort against anti-interventionists.<sup>22</sup> Francis MacDonnell, in his book *Insidious Foes:*

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Press," *Journalism History* 19 (Spring 1993): 3–10.

20. Warren Kimball was solicited to comment on my article for H-Diplo, the diplomatic history Internet discussion list. He praised my point that the origins of illegal surveillance for the White House date back to FDR and not Nixon. He criticized me, however, for not adequately proving my contention that FBI political reports permitted Roosevelt to not worry about his domestic opponents as he had kept tabs on them. I may have overstated my case, but I was also not clear in my argument. I should have stated that Roosevelt gathered sensitive political intelligence without his critics knowing about it, and this information, in part, allowed him to implement his conception of the country's national security needs. Warren F. Kimball, Review of Douglas M. Charles, "Informing FDR" (19 April 2000), H-Diplo discussion list, <http://www.h-net.msu.edu>.

21. Douglas M. Charles and John Rossi, "FBI Political Surveillance and the Charles Lindbergh Investigation, 1939–1944," *Historian* 59 (Summer 1997): 831–47; Douglas M. Charles, "Informing FDR: FBI Political Surveillance and the Isolationist-Interventionist Foreign Policy Debate, 1939–1945," *Diplomatic History* 24 (Spring 2000): 211–32; Charles, "Franklin D. Roosevelt, J. Edgar Hoover, and FBI Political Surveillance," *USA Today* 128 (September 1999): 74–76.

22. Roy Turnbaugh, "The FBI and Harry Elmer Barnes: 1936–1944," *Historian* 42 (May 1980): 385–98.

*The Axis Fifth Column and the American Home Front* (1995), analyzed the FBI's activity during this period but only insofar as it related to the perceived Fifth Column threat.<sup>23</sup> Barton Bernstein surveyed very briefly Roosevelt's interest in FBI reports about his critics, but in the larger context of the abuse of executive authority dating from 1940.<sup>24</sup> And John F. Berens noted Roosevelt's empowerment of the FBI but overlooked its monitoring of anti-interventionists in his broad and concise survey article "The FBI and Civil Liberties from Franklin Roosevelt to Jimmy Carter—An Historical Overview" (1980).<sup>25</sup>

This book further makes a contribution to the historiography, in terms of the FBI at least, surrounding the origins of the American national security state. If the national security state is defined as the country placing itself on a permanent wartime footing given global threats to national security (nuclear weapons, Cold War, terrorism) and the loss of geographic security (the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, the Pearl Harbor attack, and 9/11), the stepping stone to that was found during the prewar surveillance of, in part, the anti-interventionists. Moreover, the national security state can be understood, wrote Daniel Yergin, as "a unified pattern of attitudes, policies, and institutions."<sup>26</sup> While the attitudes and policies that made up what we would consider the national security state developed primarily with the onset of the Cold War from 1947 (containment and a belief that to secure the United States the country must be proactive internationally), the institutions—specifically the FBI—clearly began to develop a *systematic* security consciousness involving intelligence investigations against *both* radicals and legitimate foreign policy critics during the period before the American entrance into the Second World War. Even historian David Reynolds, in his important book *From Munich to Pearl Harbor* (2001), while not at all examining the FBI, does conclude that by "the end of 1941 many features of what would emerge as the 'national security state' were already apparent in embryo, albeit applied to a very different enemy."<sup>27</sup>

23. Francis MacDonnell, *Insidious Foes: The Axis Fifth Column and the American Home Front* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 157–83.

24. Barton J. Bernstein, "The Road to Watergate and Beyond: The Growth and Abuse of Executive Authority since 1940," *Law and Contemporary Problems* 40 (Spring 1976): 58–76.

25. John F. Berens, "The FBI and Civil Liberties from Franklin Roosevelt to Jimmy Carter—An Historical Overview," *Michigan Academician* 13 (1980): 131–44.

26. Daniel Yergin, *Shattered Peace: The Origins of the Cold War and the National Security State* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1977), 5.

27. David Reynolds, *From Munich to Pearl Harbor: Roosevelt's America and the Origins of the Second World War* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2001), 5. In terms of the embryonic aspects of the national security state, Reynolds identifies America's "new global perspective on international

Therefore, I have termed this period the domestic security state—the point at which the FBI developed its domestic intelligence apparatus and international intelligence liaison to the degree that it operated semi-autonomously and was on a solid footing toward evolving into the later, Cold War-era national security state once the country adopted its Cold War attitudes and policies.

Whereas during the national security state era the FBI was part of, and concerned with, ensuring the nation's security from communist subversion that was believed to be a global effort directed from Moscow, during the domestic security state period the FBI was more concerned with preserving the nation's domestic security from perceived internal threats. Those threats were identified in fascist and communist "subversives," but also, significantly, in legitimate foreign policy critics who were systematically monitored under a domestic security rationale. Even the FBI's own jargon differentiated between the Great Debate period and the Cold War: during the former they investigated threats to "domestic security" while during the Cold War that changed to "national security." But the pattern of FBI surveillance and its justification remained the same, while during the Cold War the bureau developed a greater degree of autonomy, more intrusive investigative techniques, and illegal disruption programs.

In his book *Shattered Peace* (1977), Daniel Yergin traced the origins of the national security state back to Woodrow Wilson and his conception of American internationalism. Yergin argued that American policy makers conceptualized security concerns at this time in light of a perceived expansionist and ideological Soviet Russia.<sup>28</sup> Frank J. Donner similarly identified the federalization of domestic intelligence in the First World War era and the period of the Russian Revolution. It was at this time, he argued, that the FBI involved itself in large-scale investigations of primarily left-wing dissenters, yet he argued that the national security state is best demonstrated during the Cold War. And Athan Theoharis has examined the national security state in terms of McCarthyism, dating its origins to the Cold War, which, he argued, along with President Truman's rhetoric and poor leadership, permitted such abuses to be wrought. He furthered his argument in *Spying on Americans* (1978) where he argued that it was during the Cold War when the Congress deferred to the executive in matters of national security and tolerated secrecy as necessary to effect security policy.<sup>29</sup>

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relations" with a concomitant expansion of U.S. security in terms of geography and "the assertion of U.S. principles of liberal, capitalist democracy."

28. Yergin, *Shattered Peace*.

29. See Donner, *The Age of Surveillance*; Athan Theoharis, *Seeds of Repression*; Harry S.

This study hopes to complement the work of FBI, anti-interventionist, and national security historians by examining the FBI's political surveillance of Roosevelt's anti-interventionist foreign policy critics from 1939 to 1945. FBI political surveillance during this period was extensive, widespread, and sought to be responsive to Roosevelt's political interests. The extent of the bureau's efforts, moreover, closely mirrors later Cold War patterns of FBI behavior. This is significant inasmuch as previous historians have identified the national security state as being inextricably linked to fears of communist subversion and the spread of Bolshevism. This study, and contemporary events involving international terrorism, demonstrate that the national security state extends beyond national and international concerns with communism, even if communism was the primary focus of national security bureaucrats during the Cold War. The Great Debate illustrates well that most any perceived threat during a crisis period—whether fierce anti-interventionist opposition to foreign policy or acts of terrorism—that eventually lead policymakers to develop the attitudes, policies, and institutions consumed with security concerns would morph into the national security state.



The terrorist attacks in New York City and Washington, D.C., on 11 September 2001 and subsequent government reaction have brought new significance to this study. In reaction to these events, in an effort to safeguard the nation from further terrorist incidents, the Bush administration sought to suspend investigative restrictions placed on the FBI in the 1970s. Following Hoover's death in 1972, and revelations of intrusive FBI domestic surveillance activities, FBI investigations were formally restricted to prevent the bureau from investigating politically oriented groups. Some in the Bush administration, however, believed these restrictions impeded FBI counterterrorism efforts by preventing the employment of undercover agents to monitor, without probable cause, religious and political groups.

Testifying before the Senate Judiciary Committee, Attorney General John Ashcroft defended the Bush administration's antiterrorism plan, which included a broad expansion of FBI wiretapping and investigative authority. He denied that American citizens' civil liberties would be restricted but added: "To those [critics] who scare peace-loving people with phantoms of



lost liberty, my message is this: your tactics only aid terrorists for they erode our national unity and diminish our resolve.”<sup>30</sup>

While the attorney general might have claimed individual liberties would not be violated as in the past, the Bush administration’s “PATRIOT Act” has created the potential for the FBI to resume a political surveillance role. In the current atmosphere, past fears of the influence of “subversive activities” on American national security have been replaced with concerns over terrorist activities. With increased FBI investigative authority, and a concomitant increase in government secrecy (i.e., a tightening of FOIA standards, restrictions on access to presidential records, secret meetings with corporate executives to develop national policies, and the creation of secret NSA and CIA surveillance programs),<sup>31</sup> a revival of the FBI’s interest in domestic political surveillance is possible if not probable. Indeed, by November 2003 the Congress sought to expand significantly FBI powers to examine financial records of various kinds without a judge’s approval. Also in that month, the *New York Times* reported that the FBI had begun to collect “extensive information on the tactics, training and organization of anti-war [Iraq War] demonstrators.” And by December the FBI had eliminated distinctions between criminal and intelligence investigation classifications.<sup>32</sup>

By 2005, moreover, after the presidential election, the effort to increase the FBI’s unchecked freedom in conducting investigations grew. During May, Senate Republicans and the Bush administration advocated expanding FBI powers to permit agents “to subpoena records from businesses and other institutions without a judge’s sign-off if they declared the material was needed as part of a foreign intelligence investigation.” Later that year,

30. “Ashcroft Appears before Senate to Defend Tactics,” *New York Times*, 6 December 2001; Neil A. Lewis, “Ashcroft Defends Anti-terror Plan and Says Criticism May Aid Foes,” *New York Times*, 7 December 2001.

31. Douglas Jehl, “Bush to Create New Unit in FBI for Intelligence,” *New York Times*, 30 June 2005; “Cheating History,” *New York Times*, 15 November 2001; “Critics Say New Rule Limits Access to Records,” *New York Times*, 27 February 2002; Dana Milbank and Justin Blum, “Document Says Oil Chiefs Met with Cheney Task Force,” *Washington Post*, 16 November 2005; James Risen, “Bush Lets US Spy on Callers without Courts,” *New York Times*, 16 December 2005; Dana Priest, “Covert CIA Program Withstands New Furor,” *Washington Post*, 30 December 2005.

32. “Ashcroft Urges Caution with FOIA Requests,” *Washington Post*, 17 October 2001; Ellen Nakashima, “Bush View of Secrecy Is Stirring Frustration,” *Washington Post*, 3 March 2002; Athan Theoharis to Douglas M. Charles, 6 November 2001; Eric Lichtblau, “FBI’s Reach into Records Is Set to Grow,” *New York Times*, 12 November 2003; Eric Lichtblau, “FBI Scrutinizes Antiwar Rallies,” *New York Times*, 23 November 2003; Dan Eggen, “FBI Applies New Rules to Surveillance,” *Washington Post*, 13 December 2003.



the *Washington Post* reported that the FBI had investigated “hundreds of potential violations related to its use of secret operations,” violations that were “largely hidden from public view.” More specifically, FBI agents conducted surveillance of U.S. residents for over a year “without proper paperwork or oversight.” As part of this effort, FBI agents seized e-mails and bank records without proper warrants and conducted at least one “unconsented physical search.” In response, FBI officials called the violations “administrative errors.”<sup>33</sup>

In November of 2005, it was further reported that FBI agents were frequently using national security letters “to scrutinize U.S. residents and visitors who are not alleged to be terrorists or spies.” National security letters were an innovation of the 1970s to assist FBI agents in espionage and terrorism cases, but the PATRIOT Act and the Bush administration’s guidelines have extended their use. According to the *Washington Post*, FBI agents issue more than thirty thousand national security letters each year and none of them require the oversight of a judge and receive no external review afterward.<sup>34</sup>

By December of 2005, it was also reported that someone in the FBI altered the dates on documents to cover up the employment of an illegal wiretap, and one agent was blackballed from undercover investigations after he criticized FBI violations internally. Later that month, it was further reported that FBI agents working in counterterrorism cases had monitored a “Vegan Community Project,” a Catholic Workers group, Greenpeace, and the animal advocacy group People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals.<sup>35</sup>

Evidence advanced in this book demonstrates that the roots of such FBI activity are to be found during the anti-interventionist foreign policy debate when legitimate administration critics were regarded as witting or unwitting dupes of fascists and investigated under a domestic security classification. It was during this critical period (a time of international crisis) that FBI officials acquired increased investigative authority and resorted to sensitive investigative techniques, like wiretapping, and violated

33. Eric Lichtblau, “Plan Would Broaden FBI’s Terror Role,” *New York Times*, 19 May 2005; Dan Eggen, “FBI Papers Indicate Intelligence Violations, Secret Surveillance Lacked Oversight,” *Washington Post*, 24 October 2005.

34. “Patriot Act Primer,” *Washington Post*, 3 November 2005; Barton Gelman, “The FBI’s Secret Scrutiny, In Hunt for Terrorists, Bureau Examines Records of Ordinary Americans,” *Washington Post*, 6 November 2005.

35. Eric Lichtblau, “Report Finds Cover-Up in an FBI Terror Case,” *New York Times*, 4 December 2005; Lichtblau, “FBI Watched Activist Groups, New Files Show,” *New York Times*, 20 December 2005.

investigative restrictions—all in the name of combating “subversive activity,” but too often, in reality, with the prime objective and end result being the monitoring of domestic political activity while violating the civil liberties of foreign policy critics.

## Background

The origins of the Federal Bureau of Investigation date back to the Progressive Era and the administration of the first Progressive president, Theodore Roosevelt. After Roosevelt's ascendance to the presidency in 1901, the Justice Department's responsibilities increased dramatically. Believing in the Progressive ideal of an assertive executive, Roosevelt sought to use the federal government to regulate the burgeoning corporate economy in order to save it. He therefore reinvigorated the Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890 and directed the Justice Department to prosecute those corporations he regarded as "bad trusts." Following suit, department attorneys pursued first the Northern Securities Company—a giant railroad monopoly operated by James J. Hill and J. P. Morgan—before prosecuting the Chicago meat packers, Standard Oil, and the sugar refiners all for illegal restraint of trade. But the government soon experienced difficulties. Its problems stemmed from the department attorneys' increased workload and the fact that the Justice Department did not have its own investigative unit—and could not hire private detectives because of the 1892 Pinkerton Act banning such activity—forcing it to rely upon Secret Service agents who were provided on loan. Not satisfied with the situation, and reflecting Progressives' concern for efficiency, Roosevelt decided it was time to create an investigative agency—the Bureau of Investigation (BI)—within the Justice Department.<sup>1</sup>

1. Athan Theoharis, "A Brief History of the FBI's Role and Powers," in Athan Theoharis et al., *The FBI: A Comprehensive Reference Guide* (Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press, 1999), 3; John Milton Cooper Jr., *The Warrior and the Priest: Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1983), 77; John Morton Blum, *The Republican Roosevelt*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 74–75, 85–87.

Congress hesitated and had concerns about establishing another investigative agency. Members of Congress were worried primarily because the Justice Department had used Secret Service agents to investigate (and eventually convict) a congressman and senator from Oregon for conspiracy to defraud the U.S. government in an issue involving western lands. Given the situation, in light of Roosevelt's desire to create the BI, Congress held hearings into the loaning of Secret Service agents. Members believed the Secret Service had overstepped its legal authority by loaning agents to the Justice Department, and in an effort to rationalize agent loaning the assistant chief of the Secret Service, William Moran, argued that Treasury Department funds were not spent while Justice Department funds were.<sup>2</sup> Outraged over this liberal interpretation of the Secret Service's charter, and concerned with the possible evolution of an American secret police, Congress amended its budgetary appropriations to ban the loaning of Secret Service agents. In so doing, Congress had effectively rendered Justice Department investigations impotent since they had relied exclusively upon the use of Secret Service agents. Congress, meanwhile, decided nothing regarding Attorney General Charles Bonaparte's request for funds to establish the BI.<sup>3</sup>

Congress's inaction did not daunt the Roosevelt administration, however. During the summer of 1908, while Congress was adjourned, Bonaparte used Roosevelt's executive mandate to establish the Bureau of Investigation anyway (the BI was renamed the Federal Bureau of Investigation in 1935). An outraged Congress demanded answers, but through assurances that the BI agents were professionals and would not engage in noncriminal investigations because of the attorney general's personal oversight, it acquiesced. Examined differently, Congress was assuaged with Bonaparte's appeals to the Progressive ideals of professionalism, efficiency, and rationality. Significantly, however, the BI was not charted by Congress and as its

2. David Williams, "Without Understanding: The FBI and Political Surveillance, 1908–1941" (Ph.D. diss., University of New Hampshire, 1981), 30–31. For a detailed account of the land fraud see Richard Gid Powers, *Broken: The Troubled Past and Uncertain Future of the FBI* (New York: Free Press, 2004), 28–38; Don Whitehead, *The FBI Story: A Report to the People* (New York: Random House, 1956), 17–18; Williams, "Without Understanding," 32–34. The Congress's concern was also rooted in their previous dominance in the federal government that dated from 1865 and which was now waning with the rise of Progressivism and its characteristic assertive executive. Congress was struggling with the newly invigorated presidency.

3. Williams, "Without Understanding," 34–37; Athan Theoharis and John Cox, *The Boss: J. Edgar Hoover and the Great American Inquisition* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 43.

responsibilities increased, the ability of the attorney general to monitor its activities diminished.<sup>4</sup>

The growth of BI responsibilities, and concomitant reduction of oversight, occurred rapidly. In 1910, Congress passed the White Slave Traffic Act (the Mann Act) that outlawed the transportation of women across state lines for “immoral” purposes. While the law was intended to target prostitution rings, it was interpreted to permit the government to regulate perceived immorality among the public. Then, in 1919, Congress passed another law that increased the BI’s law enforcement role. When automobile sales skyrocketed after 1916, Congress passed the Motor Vehicle Theft Act (Dyer Act) making the transportation of stolen vehicles across state lines a federal crime and thereby empowering the BI to investigate. It was this law, for example, that brought the bureau and its resources into the hunt for John Dillinger during 1933. The national character of both pieces of legislation, moreover, necessitated an expansion of the BI outside of Washington to ensure effective investigations, making the bureau a truly national police force. The long-term effects of both laws led to other developments: the bureau began to accumulate derogatory information on the private lives of citizens both common and prominent, it helped to nationalize and popularize the BI, and it diminished the attorney general’s oversight.<sup>5</sup>

With the advent of the First World War, the bureau’s responsibilities moved into the area of domestic security, increasing even more its national policing role. Most pressing at this time were fears of foreign influences upon American society. These nativist concerns stemmed not from the war but from the depressed American economy in 1914, and they were only heightened after various German attempts at sabotage were uncovered. President Woodrow Wilson did not alleviate these nativist fears when he singled out “hyphenated Americans” as the source of America’s domestic trouble and he called upon Congress to enact sedition legislation. While Congress did not act on Wilson’s wishes, the tone of his wartime preparedness campaign nevertheless encouraged an atmosphere whereby perceived disloyalty was harshly repressed.<sup>6</sup>

4. Williams, “Without Understanding,” 38, 39–41, 44–47; Theoharis and Cox, *The Boss*, 43; Lowenthal, *The Federal Bureau of Investigation*, 10–11; John Whiteclay Chambers II, *The Tyranny of Change: America in the Progressive Era, 1890–1920*, 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin’s, 1992), 140.

5. Theoharis, “A Brief History of the FBI’s Role and Powers,” 6–7; Richard Gid Powers, *Secrecy and Power: The Life of J. Edgar Hoover* (New York: Free Press, 1987), 189; Curt Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover: The Man and the Secrets* (New York: Norton, 1991), 114–15; Lowenthal, *The Federal Bureau of Investigation*, 14–15; Cook, *The FBI Nobody Knows*, 60.

6. John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860–1925*, 2nd

After several incidents of successful and attempted sabotage were discovered between 1915 and 1917, Congress responded with tough legislation. The Espionage Act of 1917 made it a crime to interfere with the draft, to foment disruption in the military, or to steal government secrets with the intent to aid the enemy during wartime. Later, the Sabotage and Sedition Acts of 1918—stronger measures yet—forbade public opposition to the government and war effort. Government officials also used the 1918 Alien Deportation Act to deport noncitizens who advocated the violent overthrow of the U.S. government.<sup>7</sup>

These various laws increased the Justice Department's responsibilities in the realm of internal security. In 1918, therefore, the department formed the Alien Enemy Registration Section, known popularly as the Alien Enemy Bureau. This agency focused on the activities of Germans and other foreign nationals, radicals, anarchists, African Americans, and all manner of perceived "subversives." It was in this section, significantly, that a young J. Edgar Hoover began his career and where he learned to use administrative procedures to bypass legal restraints. Hoover would later employ what he learned here when he took the reins of the Bureau of Investigation in 1924.<sup>8</sup> Nativist fears were then heightened in America

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ed. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 183–84; Michael J. Heale, *American Anticommunism: Combating the Enemy Within, 1830–1970* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 10, 14; Francis MacDonnell, *Insidious Foes: The Axis Fifth Column and the American Home Front* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 11–15, 23; Williams, "Without Understanding," 80. See also Harry Scheiber, *The Wilson Administration and Civil Liberties, 1917–1921* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1960). Kendrick Clements argues that Wilson merely followed public opinion when supporting repressive measures in *Woodrow Wilson: World Statesman*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1999), 176.

7. Theoharis and Cox, *The Boss*, 44–45; MacDonnell, *Insidious Foes*, 16–25.

8. Theoharis and Cox, *The Boss*, 48; Powers, *Secrecy and Power*, 55; Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover*, 69–73; Joan M. Jensen, *The Price of Vigilance* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1968), 17–26, 188–218; Cook, *The FBI Nobody Knows*, 62–63, 67. Army intelligence also took an interest in many of these same targets during the First World War period. See Roy Talbert, *Negative Intelligence: The Army and the American Left, 1917–1941* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991); Lowenthal, *The Federal Bureau of Investigation*, 36–47; Theoharis, "A Brief History of the FBI's Role and Powers," 7. Paul L. Murphy argues that civil liberties first appeared as an issue in public policy dating from WWI in his *World War I and the Origin of Civil Liberties in the United States* (New York: Norton, 1979); Kenneth O'Reilly, "Racial Matters": *The FBI's Secret File on Black America, 1960–1972* (New York: Free Press, 1989), 9–17. See also Mark Ellis, "Closing Ranks' and 'Seeking Honors': W. E. B. DuBois in World War I," *Journal of American History* 79 (June 1992): 96–124; Mark Ellis, "J. Edgar Hoover and the 'Red Summer' of 1919," *Journal of American Studies* 28 (January 1994): 39–59; and Ellis, *Race, War, and Surveillance: African Americans and the United States Government during World War I* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001). For a general history of the race riots see William M. Tuttle, *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (New York: Atheneum, 1970). See also Theodore

when, in 1917, the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia. During the years immediately following the conclusion of the First World War (1919 and 1920), concern that a similar minority was fomenting communist revolution in America increased when shipyard workers (and their sympathizers) struck in Seattle, Washington. Afterward, the country experienced a series of strikes during 1919 that seemed to confirm communist influence among workers—a fear that management deliberately manipulated to crush the labor strikes. The country then experienced a series of mail-bomb plots and other bombings (significantly at the residence of Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer), which, in light of the Bolshevik revolution and labor unrest, prompted Mitchell to purge the nation of radical influences.<sup>9</sup>

What followed was a national effort to root out radicalism that resulted in mass violations of many people's civil liberties. Palmer created a Radical Bureau—later renamed the General Intelligence Division—that was headed by J. Edgar Hoover. The problem for Palmer and the BI was that to prosecute radicals under federal law, officials had to either prove the radicals' membership in radical organizations or persuade them to admit to membership. Finding this goal insurmountable, government officials decided instead to deport the radicals and thereby eliminate the influence of foreign ideas. To do this, the BI entered into cooperation with the Labor Department's Immigration Bureau, whose agents, by altering regulations to keep radicals from consulting lawyers, could coerce confessions and therefore make them liable for deportation. It was these means that underpinned the so-called Palmer Raids, in which some 10,000 suspects were arrested nationwide but only 556 were deported.<sup>10</sup>

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Kornweibel, *Investigate Everything: Federal Efforts to Compel Black Loyalty during World War I* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002); Kornweibel, *Seeing Red: Federal Campaigns against Black Militancy, 1919–1925* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

9. Robert K. Murray, *Red Scare: A Study in National Hysteria, 1919–1920* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955), 58–68. See also Robert L. Friedheim, *The Seattle General Strike* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964); Murray, *Red Scare*, 69–71. A thorough biography of Attorney General Palmer is Stanley Coben, *A. Mitchell Palmer: Politician* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963).

10. Murray, *Red Scare*, 193–94; Theoharis, "A Brief History of the FBI's Role and Powers," 8; William Preston Jr., *Aliens and Dissenters: Federal Suppression of Radicals, 1903–1933*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 208–12, 216–17; Lowenthal, *The Federal Bureau of Investigation*, 184, 199, 211–17; Preston, *Aliens and Dissenters*, 222–24. See also Louis F. Post, *The Deportations Delirium of Nineteen-Twenty: A Personal Narrative of an Historic Official Experience* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1970); David Williams, "The Bureau of Investigation and Its Critics, 1919–1921: The Origins of Federal Political Surveillance," *Journal of American History* 68 (December 1981): 563, 567–79.

The BI's participation in the Palmer Raids was just one example of questionable activity that plagued the bureau of the early 1920s. During the presidency of Warren G. Harding, an administration notorious for its abuses, the Teapot Dome scandal marked the height of such nefarious activity. The scandal centered on oil deposits located in Wyoming and California that were set aside as naval reserves but placed under the control of the Interior Department and its secretary, Albert B. Fall. The secretary had lost his personal fortune in a bad Mexican mining venture, leading him to sign contracts to permit two oil companies to tap the government's reserves in exchange for \$400,000 in "loans."<sup>11</sup>

By 1923, Montana Senators Thomas Walsh and Burton K. Wheeler—later a prominent anti-interventionist—exposed Fall's corruption and initiated a Senate investigation. But in an attempt to quash it, Attorney General Harry Daugherty and BI Chief William J. Burns dispatched agents to investigate Walsh and Wheeler to uncover anything with which to discredit them. In these efforts, BI agents intercepted their mail, tapped their telephones, and broke into their offices. In the end, Daugherty and Burns were able to concoct an indictment against Wheeler for alleged misuse of his office to obtain gas and oil leases. The charges were bogus and, at trial, Walsh—serving as Wheeler's defense attorney—was able to demonstrate as much. When it was all over, the BI's crimes were uncovered and the public became outraged at government abuses.<sup>12</sup>

Harding died before any of this became public, however, and his successor—Calvin Coolidge—successfully distanced himself from the scandals and appointed a reformist attorney general to clean house. The new attorney general, Harlan Fiske Stone, believed men of high moral and professional standards would bring order to the corrupted department. Following a cabinet meeting in May 1924, Stone discussed his plan with Commerce Secretary Herbert Hoover, who recommended J. Edgar Hoover as a possible replacement for the recently fired Burns. Despite Hoover's participation in the Palmer Raids, which seemed to have gone unnoticed, and with recommendations from such esteemed figures as the commerce secretary, Stone offered Hoover the job.<sup>13</sup>

11. On the Teapot Dome scandal see Burl Noggle, *Teapot Dome: Oil and Politics in the 1920s* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1962); and J. Leonard Bates, *Senator Thomas J. Walsh of Montana: Law and Public Affairs, from TR to FDR* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 212–39.

12. Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover*, 118–21; Cook, *The FBI Nobody Knows*, 129–33, 133–35; Burton K. Wheeler and Paul F. Healy, *Yankee from the West* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1962), 213–45.

13. Whitehead, *The FBI Story*, 66–67; Theoharis and Cox, *The Boss*, 84; Cook, *The FBI*



Initially working within the new investigative guidelines laid down by Stone, Hoover publicly disbanded the now-controversial Radical Bureau, ended the use of wiretaps, and investigated only violations of federal criminal statutes. Publicly supporting the attorney general's guidelines, Hoover assured Americans that the bureau would not collect political intelligence. Stone, believing that professionalism and high moral standards would ensure no abuses, trusted the new director and, at every turn, Hoover sought to demonstrate his loyalty.<sup>14</sup>

Irrespective of the guidelines and Hoover's promises to abide by them, he and the bureau continued to monitor "radical" activities, as Hoover defined them. While this monitoring did not reach previous levels, it nevertheless occurred. To gather this intelligence without being discovered, Hoover devised special procedures to ensure confidentiality. These included the clipping of press stories, compiling unsolicited material on radical activities, using euphemisms to conceal illicit sources ("confidential source"), and working closely with local police forces that regularly monitored radicals and then "volunteered" their data to bureau agents.<sup>15</sup>

Hoover then devised a special procedure that would relay sensitive intelligence about the personal and political lives of prominent Americans not into the bureau's central records system but directly to his desk. Such reports were labeled "personal and confidential" and permitted bureau agents to continue to monitor political activity (investigating the ACLU, trade unionist William Foster, and other leftist groups) while publicly the bureau demonstrated its adherence to the new department guidelines.<sup>16</sup>

During the presidency of Herbert Hoover, the Bureau of Investigation began to service, but only on an ad hoc basis, White House requests for political intelligence.<sup>17</sup> And by President Hoover's last year in office, Director Hoover helped him in dealing with the Bonus Marchers. Feeling desperate during the Great Depression, thousands of unemployed First World War veterans marched on Washington, D.C., demanding payment of their promised cash bonus of \$1,000. While the payment was to be

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*Nobody Knows*, 136–38.

14. Theoharis and Cox, *The Boss*, 84–87.

15. *Ibid.*, 93–94.

16. This filing procedure is discussed in Athan Theoharis, ed., *From the Secret Files of J. Edgar Hoover* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1991), 2–4; David Williams, "They Never Stopped Watching Us': FBI Political Surveillance, 1924–1936," *UCLA Historical Journal* 2 (1981): 7–14; Frank J. Donner, *Protectors of Privilege: Red Squads and Police Repression in Urban America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

17. Kenneth O'Reilly, "Herbert Hoover and the FBI," *Annals of Iowa* 47 (Summer 1983): 49–57.

dispersed only in 1945, given the veterans' economic plight, they believed the bonus should be paid immediately. They resolved, therefore, not to leave the capital until their demands were met.<sup>18</sup>

Fearful of economic-oriented protest, some government officials believed that communists were responsible for the bonus protest. Joining with Army Chief of Staff Douglas MacArthur, Hoover convinced the president that the march was a communist plot. Trusting in his subordinates, President Hoover ordered the army to disperse the veterans. This only worked against the president during an election year, however. He was roundly criticized for the harsh treatment the veterans received, leading the president to order the bureau to prove communist links. Bureau agents attended protest rallies, monitored Bonus Marcher activity, and, with the help of local red squads, investigated veterans groups to determine the extent of communist infiltration. Agents discovered none.<sup>19</sup>

Out of Progressive-Era ideals of rational and efficient government, the Bureau of Investigation was born during the Theodore Roosevelt administration. As its responsibilities grew over time, the ability of the attorney general to oversee its activities diminished. This led to an abuse of power that only grew with increased responsibilities, wartime necessity, and a postwar Red Scare. Eventually, those abuses became public and administrative reforms were created to deal with them. Instead of ending the bureau's ability to monitor political activity, the reforms only lessened them. Even still, the bureau of the 1920s was small and not a significant investigative force, but this would change with the rise of another global emergency and another president named Roosevelt.



When Franklin Roosevelt acceded to the presidency in 1933, J. Edgar Hoover, for the first time since taking over the bureau in 1924, was part of a politically left-of-center administration. One might think at first glance that Roosevelt would have no room in his administration for a conservative figure like Hoover; yet despite their contrasting political identities, the FBI director developed an intimate working relationship with the president. Hoover then saw over the next twelve years an incremental expansion of

18. See Donald J. Lisio, *The President and Protest: Hoover, Conspiracy, and the Bonus Riot* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1974).

19. Williams, "They Never Stopped Watching Us," 15; O'Reilly, "Herbert Hoover and the FBI," 57–58; Lisio, *The President and Protest*, 238–50; Williams, "They Never Stopped Watching Us," 15–16.

FBI authority. This amicable relationship was not evident, however, from the outset, but Hoover worked hard to serve the president and his goals, at least as the FBI director perceived them. First, by assisting the attorney general with his Crime Control Program—by combating the perceived rise in crime during the Depression—and then by providing the president with political intelligence on his foreign policy critics, Hoover rose from obsequious bureaucrat to national celebrity. Over time he became practically indispensable to the president, while his bureau was transformed into a more powerful and greatly expanded agency.

Because Hoover was a Republican appointee (of the Coolidge administration) and since his job was not protected by the civil service, it was likely that a Democratic administration would replace him. It was widely believed, moreover, that this would indeed happen, but Hoover—a master bureaucrat—did not lack the ability to preserve his job. He had advocates in various government posts who advocated his retention, such as Supreme Court Justice Harlan Fiske Stone and former Assistant Attorney General Francis Garvan. The director, furthermore, lobbied conservative Democrats and appointed over one hundred FBI agents from the South—Roosevelt relied upon southern Democrats for New Deal support.<sup>20</sup>

Irrespective of these efforts, Hoover's position was threatened when Roosevelt announced in February 1933 his choice to oversee the Justice Department: Thomas Walsh. Hoover could have faced no more threatening a nominee than Walsh. The firebrand senator from Montana had led investigations into the Palmer Raids and Teapot Dome scandal, and he was a longtime critic of the FBI and Hoover. Complicating matters for Hoover, on 28 February Walsh announced his intention to reorganize the department through significant personnel changes, and then Hoover learned that numerous individuals had lobbied Senator Burton Wheeler to oppose Hoover's reappointment. Hoover's prospects for continuing as bureau director seemed dim at best.<sup>21</sup>

According to Wheeler's account, Hoover "got wind of this talk and came to see me" to deny any involvement "in the [Teapot Dome era] reprisals against me." It seems clear that Hoover sought to mend political fences in order to save his job, but, ironically enough, the effort was fleeting. On 2 March 1933, while honeymooning in North Carolina, Attorney General—

20. Theoharis and Cox, *The Boss*, 111–12; Powers, *Secrecy and Power*, 182.

21. Theoharis and Cox, *The Boss*, 112–13; Powers, *Secrecy and Power*, 180. Though he overlooks the FBI, on Walsh's appointment see J. Leonard Bates, *Senator Thomas J. Walsh of Montana: Law and Public Affairs, from TR to FDR* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 325–31.

designate Walsh died of a massive coronary. While the threat that Walsh had posed dissipated, Hoover nevertheless took steps to ensure that no questions were raised over the timing of his death. Hoover sent agents to escort Mrs. Walsh back to Washington and made sure that a thorough and documented medical examination was conducted on Walsh's remains.<sup>22</sup>

Roosevelt's new choice for attorney general was not a threat to Hoover's tenure as bureau director. Homer Cummings, an avid New Dealer, was far less concerned with Hoover's past than Walsh had been. Nevertheless, Hoover continued to lobby friends and allies—significantly Roosevelt aides Edwin Watson and Stephen Early—to ensure his continuance in government. And when Cummings was sworn in as attorney general, Hoover continued to ingratiate himself with his superior. The way Hoover did this was by supporting the activist Cummings's crime-control program.<sup>23</sup>

Crime had become a popular issue during the Great Depression, a time when many Americans perceived a breakdown in law and order. Whether it involved celebrity kidnappings, bank robberies, or the adventures of various gangsters, many people believed that the crime issue had its roots in the inability of local police forces to deal with sophisticated (i.e., interstate) and organized criminals. New Dealers, like Cummings, sought to use the popularity of the issue to involve the federal government in an area that previously had been the responsibility of local and state authorities. To inaugurate his crusade against crime, the attorney general first increased the Bureau of Investigation's legal authority.<sup>24</sup>

To expand the federal police force, President Roosevelt issued an executive order in June 1933 that combined the Prohibition Bureau (now defunct with the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment), the Bureau of Identification (already under Hoover's supervision), and the Bureau of Investigation. The newly combined organization was then renamed the Division of Investigation and by late summer Hoover controlled all of it. The organization would see one further name change when in July 1935 it became, permanently, the Federal Bureau of Investigation—a designation reflecting its more important role in the country.<sup>25</sup>

22. Burton K. Wheeler and Paul F. Healy, *Yankee from the West* (Garden City, NY: Double Day, 1962), 243; Theoharis and Cox, *The Boss*, 113.

23. Fred J. Cook, *The FBI Nobody Knows* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), 150–51; Theoharis and Cox, *The Boss*, 114–16. On Cummings as attorney general see Richard W. Steele, *Free Speech in the Good War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 20, 31–32.

24. William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932–1940* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 334; Theoharis and Cox, *The Boss*, 121.

25. Powers, *Secrecy and Power*, 182–83.

Before Cummings delivered his crime program—a total of twelve bills that would dramatically alter the federal government’s role in national policing—he initiated a public-relations campaign to generate mass support and promote the newly expanded FBI. For the first two years of the effort, public attention was focused on Cummings’s anticrime work while Hoover went largely unnoticed. Among Cummings’s innovations was a national “Public Enemies” list that took advantage of the public’s fascination with gangsters. It was the FBI’s interaction with these popular criminals, moreover, that helped the public-relations effort gain real traction.<sup>26</sup>

Cummings used various incidents—the Kansas City Massacre, the kidnapping of Charles Urschel, and the pursuit of Charles “Pretty Boy” Floyd, Lester “Baby Face” Nelson, Alvin “Old Creepy” Karpis, Clyde Barrow, and Bonnie Parker—to promote his program to win acceptance for an expanded federal role in law enforcement. But one case in particular, that of John Dillinger, did more than any other to assist Cummings.<sup>27</sup>

During the spring and fall of 1933, career-criminal John Dillinger robbed ten banks and committed various misdemeanors. He was arrested twice and both times escaped, but it was the second escape that brought the FBI in on the case. Upon breaking out of jail, Dillinger audaciously stole his jailer’s car and drove it from Indiana into Illinois and thereby violated the Dyer Act of 1919. Cummings made political capital of the event, specifically singling out Dillinger as a reason why the federal government needed increased policing powers. The resultant publicity Dillinger offered created public support for the crime bill. Indeed, on 6 May 1934, somebody purporting to be Dillinger wrote carmaker Henry Ford to thank him “for building the Ford V-8 as fast and as sturdy a car as you did, otherwise I would not have gotten away from the coppers in that Wisconsin, Minnesota case.”<sup>28</sup>

26. Theoharis and Cox, *The Boss*, 122; Powers, *Secrecy and Power*, 186.

27. For a history of these efforts see Bryan Burrough, *Public Enemies: America’s Greatest Crime Wave and the Birth of the FBI, 1933–34* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004). See also Cook, *The FBI Nobody Knows*, 158–59, 176, 183, 189–93; Curt Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover: The Man and the Secrets* (New York: Norton, 1991), 167–200; Don Whitehead, *The FBI Story: A Report to the People* (New York: Random House, 1956), 83–103; and Ralph de Toledano, *J. Edgar Hoover: The Man in His Time* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1973), 102–13.

28. Letter, John Dillinger to Henry Ford, 6 May 1934, FBI 62–29777–1338. Ford mailed the letter to FBI Director Hoover, who ordered lab tests on the document to determine if the author was indeed John Dillinger, but in their efforts “[n]o identifications were effected.” Letter, Donald S. Leonard to Hoover, 21 May 1934, FBI 62–29777–1678; Letter, Hoover to Leonard, 28 May 1934, FBI 62–29777–1678.

Few politicians in this atmosphere could oppose the federalization of crime control; their states' rights arguments carried little weight in such a political dynamic. In the meantime, Cummings worked behind the scenes to line up conservatives and New Dealers with his proposals and, after the president publicly announced his support, the crime-bill package was sent to the House. On 19 May 1934, Congress passed the first six bills of Cummings's program and, by June, it passed three more. Thereafter the FBI was granted full arrest powers, was permitted to carry firearms, had its jurisdiction expanded to include apprehending escaped felons who crossed state lines, and it could automatically enter kidnapping cases after a period of seven days. Additionally, interstate racketeering (by phone or mail) became a felony and the FBI was authorized to investigate bank robberies if the bank was a member of the Federal Reserve. These new laws, and others, in addition to the publicity generated by Cummings's crime-control program, helped to make the FBI a national police force and, among Americans, a revered government agency.<sup>29</sup>

Having achieved success with the anticrime crusade and thereby having its powers and jurisdiction expanded, by 1934–35 the FBI was ready to assume new responsibilities when foreign threats increasingly drew the attention of President Roosevelt. With fascist and military aggression spreading in Europe, Africa, and Asia, Roosevelt became more sensitive to the domestic threat those forces might sow in the United States. As the world moved closer to global war, and as Roosevelt's foreign policy increasingly assumed a more internationalist perspective between 1934 and 1941, the FBI's authority and powers in domestic security cases increased. The bureau's growth as a domestic intelligence agency, in fact, can be charted alongside America's increasing preoccupation with foreign policy issues during the 1930s.

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Franklin D. Roosevelt by nature and experience was an internationalist man. He was born into a wealthy, aristocratic family with whom he enjoyed summers in Europe. He began his formal education at elite institutions such as the Groton School, and then Harvard and Columbia, where he debated the lively international issues of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The future president's upbringing, travels, and education instilled in him a serious commitment to internationalism. This

29. O'Reilly, "A New Deal for the FBI," 643.

commitment was reflected in his service as President Woodrow Wilson's assistant secretary of the navy from 1913 to 1920, a position from which he advocated an expansion of American naval power. Then, as the Democratic vice-presidential candidate in 1920, Roosevelt championed passage of the Versailles Treaty and American membership in the League of Nations. His commitment to internationalism notwithstanding, Roosevelt was also a man of his time who abhorred war, believed that peace and prosperity were inextricably linked, and advocated a free hand for America in international relations.<sup>30</sup>

Yet beyond his internationalist tendencies, Roosevelt was also a talented and savvy politician. Understanding the country's desire to turn inward following the onset of the Great Depression, Roosevelt decided—for political reasons—not to issue any kind of public statements on foreign policy. Later, as a presidential candidate, he even went so far as to disavow his previous support for American entry into the League of Nations and he made no important foreign policy pronouncements during his campaign. Roosevelt knew that given the severity of the domestic economy, he would never be elected president as an internationalist; moreover, Roosevelt believed that before America could again lead in world affairs it first had to effect relief at home. In part, because he made no issue of foreign affairs, Roosevelt won the support of a majority of later anti-interventionists in 1932, such as Senators Burton K. Wheeler and Gerald Nye.<sup>31</sup>

Upon assuming the presidency, Roosevelt focused almost exclusively on domestic affairs while rendering foreign relations of secondary importance. This is not surprising inasmuch as the devastating impact of the Great Depression in America necessitated the president's priorities. The gross national product had dropped from \$87 billion in 1929 to \$41 billion by 1933, while the jobless rate had exceeded 15 million. Therefore, Roosevelt the internationalist acted as a nationalist between 1932 and 1934.<sup>32</sup>

Roosevelt's priorities were, indeed, reflected in how he handled foreign policy. His foreign policy team espoused both internationalist and

30. Alan Brinkley, *Liberalism and Its Discontents* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 1–16; Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 3–18; Wayne S. Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists, 1932–1945* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 3–5.

31. Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, 18–20; Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists*, 17–27.

32. Gerald D. Nash, *The Great Depression and World War II: Organizing America, 1933–1945* (New York: St. Martin's, 1979), 7.



nationalist viewpoints, placing them in constant conflict. His secretary of state, Cordell Hull, was an internationalist who was fiercely dedicated to reciprocal trade agreements, but he was chosen more to satisfy Democratic politics than for his worldview. On the other hand, Roosevelt's assistant secretary of state, Raymond Moley, advocated "a considerable insulation of our national economy from the rest of the world." In short, Roosevelt created an inconsistent foreign policy apparatus where major policy decisions were centralized in the White House so as to not disturb his domestic political agenda, which was his priority. Such an approach was apparent in his handling of both the 1933 London Economic Conference, where American policy was unclear and ineffectual, and the World Disarmament Conference in Geneva, where Roosevelt failed to make any serious effort other than endorsing the idea of disarmament.<sup>33</sup>



By 1938, with no major New Deal legislation being introduced and with Roosevelt's domestic influence curtailed as a result of the "court packing" scheme, he began to focus more on world affairs. The expansion of Nazi power and the spread of fascism and militarism across the globe during the mid- to late 1930s led some administration officials to become concerned over the rise of fascist elements within the United States. Indeed, extreme right-wingers in America, like the vocal German American Bund, denounced Roosevelt and the New Deal as communistic. While on the surface it might have appeared there were ties between Nazi Germany and the small but highly visible fascist groups in the United States, in reality those links were minimal. Nevertheless, there was a strong perception that a domestic fascist threat existed. In 1934 and 1935, for example, several books were published examining the popularity of American fascism, such as Carmen Haider's *Do We Want Fascism?* (1934), Norman Thomas's *The Choice Before Us* (1934), Raymond Gram Swing's *The Forerunners of American Fascism* (1935), and Sinclair Lewis's popular novel *It Can't Happen Here* (1935).<sup>34</sup>

33. Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, 23–34; Irwin F. Gellman, *Secret Affairs: Franklin Roosevelt, Cordell Hull, and Sumner Welles* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 20–38; Moley quoted in Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists*, 52. On the conferences see Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, 51–70; Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists*, 39–47, 59, 60–76; Gellman, *Secret Affairs*, 38–42. On German foreign policy during this period see Gerhard Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany: Diplomatic Revolution in Europe, 1933–36* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

34. Carmen Haider, *Do We Want Fascism?* (New York: John Day, 1934); Norman Thomas,



Concern led Roosevelt to call a conference on 8 May 1934 with the attorney general, treasury secretary, labor secretary, and FBI and Secret Service chiefs to discuss the situation. During the conference, the president ordered the FBI to monitor American Nazis and their sympathizers and to determine the extent to which Germany had influenced domestic groups. Over the next two years the White House received regular FBI reports on right-wing elements as well as other sundry reports on administration critics. This was the first instance of an increase in FBI authority in domestic security matters during the Roosevelt administration that had at its origin a concern with the effects of foreign influence on domestic affairs, and in time this authority would only increase.<sup>35</sup>

In the meantime, by 1934, Congress had assumed a prominent role in foreign policy and was asserting itself in this area while not automatically deferring to the chief executive. Its primary concern was how to deal with an expansionist Germany and Japan in relation to U.S. strategic and economic interests without becoming entangled in anything that might lead to war, with the First World War being the best example. This reassertion of congressional prerogative in foreign policy stemmed from a widespread postwar disillusionment over the purpose and effects of the First World War. Highlighting and contributing to these concerns was the publication of various books on the subject, such as Harry Elmer Barnes's *Genesis of the World War* (1926) and Helmuth Engelbrecht and Frank Hanigen's *Merchants of Death* (1934). This was followed by the formation of a Senate committee, led by North Dakota Senator Gerald Nye, to study the influence munitions manufacturers and international bankers had in bringing the country to war. While the Nye Committee (1934–36) found no evidence that special interests had influenced American participation in war, it nevertheless popularized the issue and fed American postwar disillusionment.<sup>36</sup>

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*The Choice Before Us* (New York: Macmillan, 1934); Raymond Gram Swing, *Forerunners of American Fascism* (New York: Julian Messner, 1935); Sinclair Lewis, *It Can't Happen Here* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran, 1935). For the impact of these popular works on public perceptions of domestic fascism, see Francis MacDonnell, *Insidious Foes: The Axis Fifth Column and the American Home Front* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 29–32.

35. Williams, "They Never Stopped Watching Us," 21–22; Theoharis and Cox, *The Boss*, 148–49.

36. See David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 387–88; Wayne S. Cole, *Senator Gerald P. Nye and American Foreign Relations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962), 60–81. On the influence Dorothy Detzer had on the Nye Committee see Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, *Changing Differences: Women and the Shaping of American Foreign Policy, 1917–1994* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 65–83.

A direct result of the intense disillusionment over the war was Congress's passing of legislation designed to prevent American participation in another Great War. The first of these laws, over which the White House and Congress debated the amount of discretion it would permit the president, concerned the sale of arms to countries at war. Congressional anti-interventionists sought a mandatory arms embargo while Roosevelt wanted a discretionary one, leading both sides to stalemate in the summer of 1935. Only with the threat of a filibuster did congressional leaders agree to a compromise whereby an arms embargo would go into effect with the president's declaration of the existence of hostilities. Furthermore, the bill excluded belligerent submarines from American ports and permitted Americans to travel on belligerent vessels but at their own risk. Roosevelt, sensing the country's mood, agreed to the measure and signed it into law on 31 August 1935, but warned that the law's "inflexible provisions" might yet drag the country into war.<sup>37</sup>

The provisions of the Neutrality Act were tested two months later when, on 3 October 1935, Fascist Italy invaded Ethiopia, thereby initiating the start of global (i.e., Japanese and European) fascist military aggression. Two days later Roosevelt declared the existence of war, which, according to the Neutrality Act, mandated an arms embargo on all belligerents. The embargo, however, had negligible effects on Italy's attack and so was largely symbolic. Moreover, because Africa was outside of America's national interests, the government was not prepared to take the steps necessary, in terms of a collective international embargo as proposed by the League of Nations, to affect seriously Italy's war effort. At the time, American companies maintained a \$25,000 monthly export average with Italy that, by the following year, increased to \$583,000. Nevertheless, anti-interventionists were pleased with the Neutrality Act and pleased that the conflict in Africa promoted further debate on how to improve the measure.<sup>38</sup>

With the Neutrality Act to expire in early 1936, Congress debated whether to extend the law's provisions. Anti-interventionists looked to the Italo-Ethiopian War as evidence for increased use of embargos while Roosevelt and his supporters sought greater executive latitude in declaring neutrality. Given the country's mood, the president's efforts were fleeting, and in February Congress extended the provisions of the 1935 Neutrality Act and added a ban on the extension of loans to countries at war. The

37. Justus D. Doenecke and John E. Wilz, *From Isolation to War, 1931-1941*, 2nd ed. (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1991), 56-57.

38. Jonas, *Isolationism in America*, 172-75; Lloyd C. Gardner, *Economic Aspects of New Deal Diplomacy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), 93, 94.

new provisions, in reality, were redundant since the 1934 Johnson Act prohibited the extension of loans to countries that had defaulted on their Great War debts. But they can be understood in the context of the day: legislators used the only example they had at hand—how the United States became involved in the Great War—in order to avoid becoming entangled in anything similar.<sup>39</sup>

Increased international tensions in 1936 raised even further issues concerning neutrality and domestic security. In 1936 Spain fell into a three-year civil war. Right-wing nationalist forces led by General Francisco Franco (aided by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy) battled the so-called Loyalists who were fighting to preserve Spain's republican government (supported by Communist Russia). Yet in this situation President Roosevelt refused to recognize belligerency, making a distinction between a civil war and an international war, and thereby prevented the Neutrality Act from going into effect. But in accord with other European powers, Roosevelt did agree to a moral embargo on arms shipments to either side in the conflict. Irrespectively, some idealistic Americans on the political left saw the war as important toward stopping the spread of fascism and, by 1937, had organized volunteer units to aid the Loyalist forces. Given external support from Germany and Italy, the Spanish Loyalist effort was doomed to failure, but another contribution to the success of Franco's forces was the advent of the Fifth Column. In September 1936, General Emilio de Mola, one of Franco's lieutenants, announced by radio that four military columns had advanced on Madrid while a fifth column of insurgents operated from within the city. Thereafter, many Americans increasingly grew worried that foreign agents might attempt to disrupt and soften up American society from within.



Worried about the domestic ramifications of growing Nazi and communist influence, as demonstrated with domestic fascists and heady American leftists who were concerned about the course of the Spanish Civil War, on 24 August 1936 President Roosevelt called FBI Director Hoover to the White House for a meeting. According to Hoover, the president “was desirous of discussing the question of subversive activities in the United States, particularly Fascism and Communism.” Roosevelt informed Hoover that “he had been considerably concerned” about the activities of these groups and

39. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 397; Jonas, *Isolationism in America*, 176–79.

that he wanted the FBI director to provide him with “a broad picture of the general movement and its activities as may affect the economic and political life of the country as a whole.” Hoover related to Roosevelt that there was no such available information from any government agency, but that the FBI’s 1916 appropriations statute “contains a provision that it might investigate any matters referred to it by the Department of State.” Piqued by Hoover’s suggestion, but fearful of the plan being leaked from the State Department, Roosevelt asked Hoover to meet with him and Secretary of State Hull the following day.<sup>40</sup>

On the afternoon of 25 August, Hoover met with Roosevelt and Hull at the White House. The president stated his concerns to Hull, noting that “it was a matter which fell within the scope of foreign affairs over which the State Department would have a right to request an inquiry to be made.” Complying with Roosevelt’s wishes, Hull asked if the president wanted the request to be put into writing, but Roosevelt disagreed, stating that he wanted “the matter to be handled quite confidentially.” President Roosevelt’s directive stepping up FBI intelligence activity, therefore, remained an oral one.<sup>41</sup>

When Hoover implemented Roosevelt’s order, however, he interpreted Roosevelt’s words to initiate not a limited investigation but an extensive one. FBI agents, thereafter, monitored the activities of alleged Fifth Columnists, pro-Nazis, and communists and then reported this information to the White House. This was an important watershed in the history of the FBI because it was from this point onward that the FBI focused more on “subversive” activities utilizing “intelligence” investigations rather than the more limiting criminal investigations. President Roosevelt, moreover, came to value the reports that Hoover volunteered to the administration, reports detailing the activities of communists but also right-wingers like the German American Bund, the Silver Shirts, Gerald L. K. Smith, Gerald Winrod, and William Dudley Pelley.<sup>42</sup>

40. Confidential memorandum, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, 24 August 1936, Folder 136, Official and Confidential files of J. Edgar Hoover, FOIA Reading room, FBI Headquarters, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as Hoover O&C).

41. Confidential memorandum, Hoover, 25 August 1936, Folder 136, Hoover O&C. See also Athan Theoharis, “The FBI’s Stretching of Presidential Directives, 1936–1953,” *Political Science Quarterly* 91 (Winter 1976–77): 649–72.

42. Leo Ribuffo, *The Old Christian Right: The Protestant Far Right from the Great Depression to the Cold War* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), 184–87. On the significance of the 1936 meeting and order see Athan Theoharis, *The FBI and American Democracy: A Brief Critical History* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 44–47.

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With international events becoming increasingly perilous—Fascist Italy's victory over Ethiopia, the Sino-Japanese War, Hitler's reoccupation of the Rhineland, and the Spanish Civil War—American anti-interventionists sought to make permanent the previously temporary neutrality legislation. As with the previous Neutrality Acts, Roosevelt sought discretion in applying the law's provisions, but domestic political events, such as the failed Judicial Reform Bill and the economic recession of 1937, prevented the president from asserting the influence that might have shaped the legislation. But Roosevelt's influence was not entirely curbed. What Congress enacted when making the Neutrality Act permanent in 1937 was the cash-and-carry provision whereby belligerents could buy nonmilitary goods from the United States if they paid for them with hard currency and transported the goods themselves. The law only delayed the inevitable, however, as it indirectly encouraged the Axis powers inasmuch as they knew the United States would not intervene directly in European events.<sup>43</sup>

Other events during 1937 and 1938 further demonstrated the influence anti-interventionists had in determining the shape of American foreign policy. In October Roosevelt delivered his so-called quarantine speech in which he chose his words carefully by stating: "War is a contagion, whether it be declared or undeclared." Reporters pressed the president to explain what he meant, but he refused. The result was that the speech seemed to please both sides of the foreign policy debate inasmuch as interventionists regarded it as calling for an activist foreign policy while anti-interventionists saw it as Roosevelt seeking to avoid war.<sup>44</sup>

Then, in 1938, Indiana Representative Louis Ludlow proposed a constitutional amendment that would have placed the country's war-making power directly with the people via referendum. While the initiative ultimately failed, it nevertheless demonstrated the popularity of the anti-interventionists at this point. Meanwhile, Fascist aggression continued with the annexation of Austria into the greater German Reich and then the Munich Crisis, where Roosevelt's actions again reflected the strength of the anti-interventionists when he appealed to European powers to negotiate the fate of the Sudetenland. American opinion started to change, but ever so hesitatingly, after Germany acquired the Sudetenland and as Japanese

43. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 400–1; Doenecke and Wilz, *From Isolation to War*, 63–64; Jonas, *Isolationism in America*, 198–99.

44. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 405–6; Doenecke and Wilz, *From Isolation to War*, 69–70.

aggression advanced in China. This led Roosevelt to begin to build up American defenses in 1938 and to recall the American ambassador to Germany following the Kristallnacht persecution of Jews.<sup>45</sup>

Domestically in 1938, Americans became increasingly concerned with apparent German attempts at internal subversion. In February, FBI agents uncovered an extensive German espionage ring in New York City that had extended itself into the armed forces and defense industries. The spy ring was undermined, however, as a result of one of its incompetent German American members, Guenther Rumrich. A ne'er-do-well who habitually found himself in trouble, Rumrich was enamored with First World War German espionage activity. After writing to the *Völkischer Beobachter*—the Nazi party's newspaper—offering to provide intelligence about the American army, Rumrich was recruited as a spy. In his espionage efforts, Rumrich only managed to collect relatively innocuous information such as venereal disease rates among American soldiers, but it was a connection he had to Scotland that led to his capture and the eventual exposure of the New York spy ring.<sup>46</sup>

Rumrich maintained contact with his German handlers through correspondence. He was instructed to write a fifty-one-year-old woman named Jessie Jordan in Dundee, Scotland, who worked as a screen for German intelligence. In 1937, the British Security Service (MI-5) obtained a warrant to intercept her mail, which led them to establish her identity. After tracing the source of her correspondence to the United States, MI-5 officials alerted the FBI and, in due course, FBI agents determined that Rumrich was one of Jordan's correspondents. He was placed under surveillance but only arrested in February 1938 after he attempted to obtain blank passports from the State Department. Upon his arrest Rumrich decided to cooperate with his captors, resulting in the exposure of his espionage ring. Despite the fact that the spy ring was, for all intents and purposes, rather inept, the case received front-page headlines in the American press and helped to foster the belief that Fifth Columnists had permeated the country. The cooperation with British intelligence, moreover, helped to lay a firm basis on which the FBI would later develop an intimate working relationship.<sup>47</sup>

45. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 418–20.

46. Secret World War II Espionage Summary, no date, FBI 65–37193–332, pp. 25–34.

47. Nigel West, *MI-5: British Security Service Operations, 1909–1945* (New York: Stein and Day, 1982), 98–100; "Leader Confesses," *New York Times*, 27 February 1938; "Spy Hunt Pressed by Agents on Trail of Two More Here," *New York Times*, 28 February 1938.

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With both the international and domestic situation developing as they did in 1938, the FBI acquired yet more investigative autonomy. Interested in the scope of the “so-called espionage situation,” President Roosevelt directed Attorney General Cummings in October to survey the government’s investigative activity. When reporting the FBI’s work to Cummings, Hoover made no attempt to hide the fact that the FBI had investigated political activity, and, in fact, he urged an expansion of the FBI’s investigative role. Hoover warned Cummings, however, against seeking legislative authority for such an expansion, observing that a law might draw criticism from people who, in Hoover’s view, did not understand the counterespionage character of FBI investigations (after 1936). The FBI director preferred to investigate under the bureau’s 1916 appropriations statute.<sup>48</sup>

President Roosevelt, apparently, was not disturbed by the political nature of some FBI investigations. This is not altogether surprising given his leadership style whereby the charismatic chief executive believed he could control his subordinates or play one off against another. Given Hoover’s development of separate filing procedures and his resort to illegal investigative methods, he effectively negated the president’s ability to hold a tight rein on the FBI’s activities. At the same time, however, Hoover did not yet feel secure enough in his position to assert the FBI’s influence to the extent that he later would during the Cold War. Nevertheless, Hoover was able to investigate matters with and without Roosevelt’s knowledge while employing extralegal investigative techniques.<sup>49</sup>

Hoover took one more step in 1939 to ensure the FBI’s sole authority to monitor domestic subversive activity. Upon learning of a plan to coordinate domestic surveillance through an interdepartmental committee, Hoover moved to disable the proposal. He impressed upon the attorney general that such a plan would cause interdepartmental chaos. Reminding Attorney General Frank Murphy (Cummings’s successor) of the widespread civil liberties abuses during the First World War, Hoover argued that centralizing domestic investigations within the FBI could avoid the mistakes of the past. This clever civil libertarian argument worked and resulted in Roosevelt’s secret order of 26 June 1939 placing all domestic investigations under the FBI, Military Intelligence Division, and Office of Naval

48. Theoharis and Cox, *The Boss*, 152–53.

49. *Ibid.*, 153.

Intelligence. More importantly, all domestic information collected by these agencies was to be coordinated with the FBI. This coordination later extended publicly to local police units in September. Hoover now had almost exclusive control over domestic surveillance, and his power and influence would increase as the Second World War developed.<sup>50</sup>

50. Theoharis and Cox, *The Boss*, 154; Press Release, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover to All Law Enforcement Officials, 6 September 1939, reprinted in Athan Theoharis, ed., *From the Secret Files of J. Edgar Hoover* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1991), 184. On Attorney General Murphy's concept of civil liberties protections, see Richard W. Steele, *Free Speech in the Good War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 21, 24, 26, 38, 48.



# Beginnings

## War, Phony War, and Election

1939–1940

With air, sea, and land forces mobilized just before dawn on 1 September 1939, the German military burst across the Polish frontier employing the tactic of the *blitzkrieg*. While fighting bravely, the Polish defense forces were utterly unprepared for the overwhelming invasion and had no chance of successfully defending their homeland. For Germany, however, the military campaign—at least—was a successful part of Adolf Hitler’s incremental plan to unite all German-speaking peoples into a single German *Reich*, while dismantling the provisions of the Versailles “*diktat*.” But after a year of appeasing Nazi Germany all to avoid another costly war in Europe, Britain and France refused to offer Hitler any further concessions. In London, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain then announced before Parliament an ultimatum for Germany to withdraw its forces immediately or face the consequences. When Germany rebuffed the demand, both Britain and France, adhering to their mutual pledge to assist Poland in the event of German aggression, declared war on 3 September.

In the United States, President Franklin Roosevelt sought to move cautiously if deliberately. Before the German invasion of Poland, between 1934 and 1939, Roosevelt’s foreign policy was restrictionist and focused upon dealing with the threat of an expansionist Germany in relation to U.S. strategic and economic interests. Now that war was present, Roosevelt was forced to deal with an expansionist and aggressive Germany as reality. Roosevelt’s foreign policy at this point changed. While officially neutral, the United States was in reality clearly anti-Axis, significantly no longer restrictionist, and predisposed to favor an Allied victory. Roosevelt, utilizing his finely honed leadership skills and with a new perception of Germany as an aggressor, was able from this point forward to shape American foreign policy incrementally toward aid short of war. In the

words of historian Wayne Cole, Roosevelt by 1939 became the “supreme political master” in guiding American foreign policy.<sup>1</sup>

The president, however, still faced a powerful and vocal anti-interventionist bloc. Some of them had sympathy for the Poles, such as Oswald Garrison Villard and the *Chicago Tribune*, both of whom regarded Hitler as an aggressor. Other anti-interventionists expressed little sympathy for the Poles because, as historian Justus Doenecke has observed, they believed Germany had a legitimate claim to the free city of Danzig and the Polish Corridor. Prominent anti-interventionist Congressman Hamilton Fish, for example, believed the Poles (and by proxy the French and British) foolish for not negotiating with Hitler. Fish wrote in his memoir that because Danzig was overwhelmingly populated with Germans and had voted in a plebiscite for reunification with Germany, that “Polish control of this city was not . . . an issue for which it was worth plunging the world into war.” Fish further believed—naively—that had the Poles negotiated, Germany would have signed “a treaty guaranteeing the independence and integrity of Poland.” Senator Burton K. Wheeler, alternatively, had little sympathy for Poland because that country, he said, had the highest level of Jewish persecutions in Europe; while historian Harry Elmer Barnes argued that a majority of Poles detested their own government anyway. Charles Lindbergh—like others—was at a loss understanding why Britain and France would wage war over Poland, but unlike some of his other anti-interventionist brethren he believed blame was equally weighted to both sides.<sup>2</sup>

By the evening of 3 September, President Roosevelt delivered one of his notable fireside chats to the American public to proclaim American neutrality. In his speech, however, the president refused to ask Americans to be neutral in thought as well as action, such as Woodrow Wilson had asked some twenty-five years earlier. And despite his call for neutrality, Roosevelt waited two full days before invoking the Neutrality Act. By moving slowly, he had permitted the Allies precious time to purchase vital war matériel. Roosevelt then called Congress into special session on 13 September to consider revision of the Neutrality Act—to abandon the embargo and permit the use of cash-and-carry for military goods.<sup>3</sup>

1. Wayne S. Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists, 1932–45* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 320.

2. Justus D. Doenecke, *Storm on the Horizon: The Challenge to American Intervention, 1939–1941* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 9–10, 14; Hamilton Fish, *Memoir of an American Patriot* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 1991), 91; Charles Lindbergh, *The Wartime Journals of Charles A. Lindbergh* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970), 250.

3. Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists*, 320–21.

This prompted the famed aviator Charles Lindbergh to respond to the president, leading him to become one of the most popular challengers to Roosevelt's foreign policy and a primary target of FBI officials. Lindbergh confided to his journal after Roosevelt's radio talk that he wished he "trusted him more." Eventually, by 7 September, after writing an article opposing American involvement, Lindbergh decided he could not "stand by and see this country pushed into war if it is not absolutely essential to the future welfare of the nation." The aviator decided to take an active part in politics—which he claimed to dislike—"to stop the trend which is now going on in this country."<sup>4</sup>

Lindbergh was assisted in his endeavor by William Castle—former undersecretary of state in the Hoover administration—to have his views broadcast nationally on the radio. On the evening of 15 September, from a hotel in Washington, D.C., Lindbergh delivered a speech entitled "America and European Wars." He advocated insulating the United States from war and warned that "by fighting for democracy abroad we may end by losing it at home." The war had the potential, he argued, to destroy Western civilization as it was then known. This speech thus marked the start of Lindbergh's concerted effort to undermine Roosevelt's foreign policy, and from this point forward—without prompting from the White House—FBI officials would take an increasing interest in the popular aviator's political dissent.<sup>5</sup>

Lindbergh continued to advocate nonintervention through further radio broadcasts. His second one aired on 13 October, titled "Neutrality and War," and a third in 1940 concerning "The Air Defense of America" in which he argued that airpower would protect the country from attack. He also published various articles in *Reader's Digest*, *Atlantic Monthly*, and *Collier's* between 1939 and the spring of 1941 that, while proving to be controversial, sparked great public interest. Lindbergh's newly found political activism—which so passionately opposed the Roosevelt administration—almost immediately caught the attention of FBI officials.<sup>6</sup>

The bureau's initial investigation of Lindbergh, dating broadly from September 1939 to April 1941 when he joined the America First Committee,

4. Lindbergh, *Wartime Journals*, 251–52.

5. Ibid.; *Wartime Journals*, 253–56; Wayne S. Cole, *Charles A. Lindbergh and the Battle against American Intervention in World War II* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), 70–72; "Lindbergh's Appeal for Isolation," *New York Times*, 16 September 1939, 9.

6. Charles A. Lindbergh, "Aviation, Geography, and Race," *Reader's Digest*, November 1939, 64–67; Lindbergh, "What Substitute for War?" *Atlantic Monthly*, March 1940, 305–7; Lindbergh, "A Letter to Americans," *Colliers*, 29 March 1941, 75–77.

consisted primarily of the collection of relatively innocuous, public source material. FBI agents scoured the public press for articles about and by Lindbergh and reviewed books that mentioned him. By clipping several hundred press stories, FBI agents were able, early on, to construct a dossier that enabled them to identify Lindbergh's associates as possible investigative targets. Searching all available public avenues, FBI agents perused the country's mainstream and extremist presses for any and all data on Lindbergh. And despite the fact that Lindbergh's public statements and associations went, at this point, no further than advocating neutrality, to FBI officials this was of interest because his "numerous remarks . . . bear upon his foreign or nationalistic sympathies."<sup>7</sup>

FBI agents did not restrict their interest to Lindbergh after 1 September 1939. During the debate over revising the Neutrality Act, Senator Gerald Nye—who cut short a speaking tour in the Midwest to play a leading role in the controversy—said that by using cash-and-carry to trade in munitions, the United States could become economically dependent upon the war. He also advocated replacing Roosevelt's cash-and-carry proposal with one that imposed an absolute embargo on belligerents, arguing that the deficit in trade would be made up in Latin America. Nye warned, moreover, that if cash-and-carry were adopted, Roosevelt would only then ask to repeal the cash provision followed by the carry provision, ultimately leading the country to war. When the actual votes were cast, Nye opposed Roosevelt's cash-and-carry proposal.<sup>8</sup>

FBI agents took an interest in Nye in October 1939, just weeks before the Senate voted on the Neutrality Act. At that time, the FBI's Los Angeles field office received unsolicited information suggesting that Nye was "in the pay of the German government" and a spy. This type of sensational accusation was leveled against various prominent anti-interventionists, and it was one that stemmed purely from their public opposition to Roosevelt's foreign policy. In Nye's case, however, his unnamed accuser believed the content of Nye's political speeches confirmed that he was pro-Nazi and, in the opinion of a San Francisco chiropractor, a German agent. Irrespective of the absurdity of such a complaint, an FBI agent was dispatched to interview the informant (not always a routine procedure) and only then did FBI officials deem the charge baseless. While FBI agents

7. Blind memorandum re Charles A. Lindbergh, no date, FBI 65-1149-152. On the use of public source material to identify targets, see Frank J. Donner, *The Age of Surveillance: The Aims and Methods of America's Political Intelligence System* (New York: Knopf, 1980), 129.

8. Doenecke, *Storm on the Horizon*, 62, 64; Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists*, 327-28, 329.

developed nothing with this first accusation against Nye, later, as the interventionist–anti-interventionist debate intensified, they would scrutinize other serious charges raised against him.<sup>9</sup>



With the Neutrality Act revised in the autumn of 1939, and Poland finally crushed with the Soviet invasion of that country in mid-September, the war in Europe suddenly—and temporarily—became quiet. Hitler had hoped the Allies, facing the reality of a defeated Poland, would recognize that he had no designs on either French or British territory and would, therefore, cease hostilities. His wish was fanciful, if at all serious. For their part, the Allies saw no reason to seek reconciliation. They believed the French border fortifications were adequate, and they thought the thick Ardennes Forest would prevent the German army from entering France. To the Allies, the only possibility for a German westward invasion was through the Low Countries where it would be countered by the combined British and French militaries and the defense forces of those invaded nations. The resultant inactivity over the winter of 1939–40 was dubbed, in the words of anti-interventionist Senator William Borah, the “phony war.”

Irrespective of international events, FBI agents continued to monitor anti-interventionist activity, primarily by collecting various newspaper clippings. They were also interested in correspondence Americans sent to the White House, but particularly that concerning Charles Lindbergh. Worried citizens wrote their government to express concern about Lindbergh or to provide information they believed would interest government officials. No matter who in the government received these letters, much of the correspondence invariably found its way to the FBI. As Lindbergh’s political efforts increased, so, too, did the bureau’s correspondence file. Reflecting Lindbergh’s increasing prominence in the foreign policy debate—where his political activity and past tours of Germany between 1936 and 1938 (where he was awarded a medal) were called into question—many Americans expressed concern over the aviator’s loyalty and patriotism. One citizen wrote: “I don’t understand why your department doesn’t bind and gag that man Charles A. Lindbergh.” Another warned the FBI: “[I]f he was investigated he would be found to be a 5th columnist and perhaps one of the world’s highest paid spies.”<sup>10</sup>

9. Letter, SAC Los Angeles to Hoover, 10 October 1939, FBI 65–6030–1.

10. Letter, (deleted) to Franklin D. Roosevelt, 22 May 1940, FBI 65–11449–2x; (deleted) to J. Edgar Hoover, 4 August 1940, FBI 65–11449–6; letter, Anonymous to FBI, 6 August

Letters written in opposition to President Roosevelt's policy, or in support of Lindbergh, proved to have greater significance, especially in propelling forward the FBI's already unauthorized—if passive—monitoring of the anti-interventionists. On 9 April 1940, however, the “phony war” came to an end. Germany invaded Denmark, leading to the subsequent conquests of Norway, Belgium, Holland, and France. In reaction, leading anti-interventionists—like Lindbergh—spoke out against American involvement. Then, in May 1940, at Roosevelt's request, Presidential Secretary Stephen Early forwarded to Hoover “a number of telegrams” that were “in opposition to national defense.” The White House had received the telegrams following Roosevelt's recent speech on national defense and the threat to America by foreign air forces. Early informed Hoover that “the President thought you might like to look them over *noting the names and addresses* of the senders.” The following month, for a second time, Early forwarded to Hoover thirty-six telegrams received “expressing approval of Col. Lindbergh's [radio] address” that month on “Our Drift Towards War.”<sup>11</sup>

Instead of merely “noting the names and addresses” of the correspondents, Hoover exceeded the president's interest and ordered a search of the FBI's files for any information on the writers. This information was then compiled and forwarded to the White House for its “convenience and reference.” President Roosevelt had not requested this information. Rather, on his own authority, Hoover offered it but Roosevelt made no complaints. His lack of concern can best be understood within the context of two comments the president made in May to Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau and Secretary of War Stimson. According to Morgenthau, the president told him over lunch: “If I should die tomorrow, I want you to know this. I am absolutely convinced that Lindbergh is a Nazi.” Roosevelt also wrote Stimson: “When I read Lindbergh's speech [of 20 May] I felt that it could not have been better put if it had been written by Goebbels himself. What a pity that this youngster has completely abandoned his belief in our form of government and has accepted Nazi methods because apparently they are efficient.”<sup>12</sup>

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1940, FBI 65–11449–21; letter, (deleted) to Attorney General Robert Jackson, 5 August 1940, FBI 65–11449–36.

11. Memorandum, Franklin D. Roosevelt to Stephen Early, 21 May 1940, Official File 10-B, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library (FDRL), Hyde Park, New York; memorandum, Stephen Early to J. Edgar Hoover, 21 May 1940, Official File 10-B, FDRL; memorandum, Early to Hoover, 17 June 1940, Official File 10-B, FDRL; memorandum, 17 June 1940, Official File 92, Charles Lindbergh, FDRL. Emphasis added in quote.

12. Personal and confidential letter, J. Edgar Hoover to Stephen Early, 26 June 1940,

Hoover's decision to brief the White House on its anti-interventionist critics marked a significant development in the Hoover-Roosevelt relationship, triggering an ongoing and intensified surveillance of the anti-interventionist movement. This was the first time that Hoover, of his own accord, provided the White House with political intelligence on the president's anti-interventionist critics. Hoover exploited the opportunity of Roosevelt's forwarding of telegrams to report back to him political information he thought Roosevelt would find of interest. The providing of intelligence on Roosevelt's anti-interventionist critics only increased as the debate intensified.

As Lindbergh's participation in the so-called Great Debate escalated over 1940, so, too, did FBI monitoring efforts. As the aviator's comments became increasingly more controversial, his popularity and influence among the public increased. In his 1939 article "Aviation, Geography, and Race," the flier's contentious and racist statements led many to conclude he was pro-Nazi. Lindbergh had described the European war as one "within our own family of nations, a war which will reduce the strength and destroy the treasures of the White race." He further wrote that survival depended on "a Western wall of race and arms which can hold back either a Genghis Khan or the infiltration of inferior blood." (Years later, well after the conclusion of the war, Lindbergh elaborated on these comments, claiming he was not a racist. He did admit, however, to believing in the superiority of races based upon achievements in culture and technology.) Since Lindbergh believed a war among Western nations would be a disaster for civilization in general, by allowing Asian elements (i.e., Russians/communists) to dominate the continent, he advocated a negotiated peace. Not surprisingly, such ideas led many, including officials in the government, to regard the flier as a Nazi sympathizer. No matter how odious his views, Lindbergh's opinions did not, however, constitute grounds for an FBI investigation.<sup>13</sup>

Lindbergh's goal during 1940 was to promote the idea that the United States should remain isolated from the European conflict and, instead, concentrate on its own defenses. He called for a clear defense policy, one that, he argued, Roosevelt had never articulated. By building a powerful and

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Official File 10-B, FDRL; personal and confidential letter, J. Edgar Hoover to Stephen Early, 2 August 1940, Official File 10-B, FDRL; entry for 20 May 1940, Henry Morgenthau Presidential Diaries, p. 563, FDRL; letter, Franklin D. Roosevelt to Henry Stimson, 21 May 1940, Henry Stimson Papers (microfilm ed., reel 101), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

13. Cole, *Charles A. Lindbergh*, 80–82. For Lindbergh's anti-Semitism see also A. Scott Berg, *Charles A. Lindbergh* (New York: Putnam, 1998), 361, 385–86.



modern air force with American air bases along the eastern and western approaches to the Western Hemisphere, Lindbergh claimed the country would be impregnable to enemy attack. "With a firm and clear-cut policy," he told Americans in a national radio broadcast in May 1940, "we can build an air defense for America that will stand above these shifting sands of war." His argument resonated with Americans in general and anti-interventionists in particular. His government work and multiple tours of foreign air forces, furthermore, led many to see him as an authority on air power who could effectively counter Roosevelt.<sup>14</sup>

Dating from 1940, FBI agents began to pursue leads suggesting that Lindbergh might have been involved with fascist organizations. To FBI officials these alleged connections assumed particular significance after Congress passed the Smith Act of 1940 that authorized prosecution of those who advocated the violent overthrow of the U.S. government. In February 1940, for example, FBI agents learned that Lindbergh was allegedly associated with the fascist group the New World Movement. The FBI's informer claimed that this group had "chosen Colonel Lindbergh as their world leader because of his youth, his prominence and other characteristics." The aviator was also rumored to be connected with an organization called the James True Associates—an anti-Communist and anti-Semitic group—whose leaders reportedly "referred to Lindbergh as their leader and a good man for the presidency." By August 1940, another FBI source reported that the German propagandist Dr. Friederich Ernst Auhagen, who had been convicted for failing to register with the Justice Department as an agent of a foreign-controlled organization, claimed that Lindbergh was a member of the Steering Committee of the American Fellowship Forum. According to Auhagen, the American Fellowship Forum was a "German propaganda unit" that "advocated a Fascist form of government and one which would cooperate with the Nazi Regime."<sup>15</sup>

Lindbergh was allegedly linked to other groups like the National Copperheads, led by Ellis Jones (who was convicted for sedition in 1942) and Robert Hoble, who "supported the policies and principles of Charles A. Lindbergh." FBI officials also monitored Joseph McWilliams and Gerald L. K. Smith, who regarded the aviator as a potential leader of their

14. Charles A. Lindbergh, "The Air Defense of America" radio address of 19 May 1940 in *Congressional Record*, 20 May 1940, 3034–35. See also Lindbergh, "What Substitute for War?" 307–8; "Text of Lindbergh Address, 'A Plea for American Independence,'" *New York Times*, 15 October 1940.

15. Summary memorandum re Charles A. Lindbergh, by D. Milton Ladd, 21 August 1942, pp. 8–11, FBI 65–11449–154.



followers. Despite Lindbergh's being popularly associated with "numerous" subversive organizations, FBI officials nevertheless admitted that "no charge could be made that he has had any direct connection with these organizations or groups." And, indeed, Lindbergh did not have any connections to any of these radical groups, but that did not stop agents from checking.<sup>16</sup>

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During January and February 1940, and before the end of the "phony war," FBI agents again focused on Senator Nye in terms of espionage. That Nye fell under FBI scrutiny for a second time is probably not unusual since it coincided with his elevation, upon the death of Senator William Borah, to the powerful Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which made him an even more influential critic. In this instance, a lawyer from Moorhead, Minnesota, named James Witherow, wrote Hoover on two separate occasions urging him to assign agents to interview two men. Witherow claimed that these two men—D. H. McArthur and John Andrews—worked for Nye and had "very intimate knowledge" of German and Japanese nationals who had visited the senator. He even claimed that a secretary from the German embassy had special access, at one point, to the senator's files. To lend credence to his claims, Witherow informed Hoover that during the First World War he had worked with "the American intelligence services," helping them to uncover domestic German espionage. Then, claiming he was familiar with German clandestine techniques, Witherow reiterated that the Germans typically used a target's political opposition against him. To Witherow, then, this explained why Senator Nye had become so vocal while chairing the Nye Committee from 1934 to 1936 and why he continued to speak out against administration foreign policy.<sup>17</sup>

Unlike the previous espionage charge against Nye, Hoover took this one more seriously. The reason for this probably stems from the fact that Witherow was a lawyer and claimed to have previously engaged in intelligence work, thereby making him in Hoover's eyes a more credible informant. Hoover referred Witherow's letter to the Justice Department for direction. Alexander Holtzoff responded to Hoover that "it is the definite

16. Summary memorandum re Charles A. Lindbergh, by D. Milton Ladd, 21 August 1942, pp. 18–21, FBI 65–11449–154.

17. Letter, James M. Witherow to Hoover, 31 January 1940, FBI 65–8799–2X; letter, Witherow to Hoover, 24 February 1940, FBI 65–8799–2X; letter, Hoover to Witherow, 14 March 1940, FBI 65–8799–2X.

opinion that no investigation should be conducted of Senator Nye on the basis of that letter.” Holtzoff, however, did not prevent any probing of Nye’s activities. Because Witherow had mentioned alleged German access to Nye’s Senate files, Holtzoff suggested, and senior FBI officials agreed, that a copy of Witherow’s letter be sent to the State Department for any action they deemed appropriate.<sup>18</sup>

Irrespective of their uncorroborated or fantastic nature, Hoover typically referred unsolicited letters to his Justice Department superiors. Hoover either truly believed the letters merited action (almost always the department ordered no investigation), or he knew they would feed already held suspicions of anti-interventionists and thereby demonstrate his usefulness to their ends. Moreover, Hoover never initiated an FBI probe of a congressman without administration approval. If any unauthorized FBI investigation became public, the onus for it would be on Hoover alone.

This dichotomy between unsolicited allegations and administration requests for investigations is exemplified in a White House request of June 1940 to investigate a matter concerning Nye and his associates. The request came the same month that Nye unsuccessfully opposed the appointments of Henry Stimson and Frank Knox to the president’s cabinet, after the Burke-Wadsworth conscription bill was introduced, and at a time when Nye publicly demanded Roosevelt’s resignation. On 18 June, Smith Brookhart—a retired Republican senator from Iowa—advised Early that a Washington, D.C., private detective and political operative named Henry Grunewald was “in cahoots” with Senator Nye. Grunewald allegedly had delivered two checks totaling some \$8,000 to Nye that the outgoing secretary of war—and anti-interventionist—Henry Woodring had written. What so concerned the White House and FBI officials was the unsubstantiated claim made by army intelligence that Grunewald was in charge of German intelligence in Washington.<sup>19</sup>

Because the White House had requested this investigation, Hoover ordered that it be given “continuous and preferred attention.” FBI agents interviewed Senator Brookhart, Nye’s former secretary D. H. McArthur, and Major Thomas C. McDonald—Brookhart’s friend who had claimed

18. Letter, James M. Witherow to Hoover, 31 January 1940, FBI 65–8799–2X; letter, Witherow to Hoover, 24 February 1940, FBI 65–8799–2X; memorandum, Edward A. Tamm to Hoover, 18 March 1940, FBI 65–8799–2X.

19. Memorandum, Early to Hoover, 18 June 1940, Official File 10-B, 146-A, FDRL; memorandum, Mrs. John Frece to Early, 18 June 1940, Official File 10-B, 146-A, FDRL; memorandum, C. M. Busbee, MID, to Acting Chief of Staff, G-2, 25 June 1940, FBI 87–2755–287.

Grunewald was a spy. Because Brookhart's statement was hearsay, FBI agents focused upon McArthur and McDonald. The former confirmed that Grunewald had regularly visited Nye's office "to pick up pieces of information which he could capitalize on," and that he had delivered cash to Nye. McDonald, moreover, believed that Grunewald's secretive nature indicated that he might be involved in German espionage. To underscore his claim, McDonald said he witnessed a conversation spoken in German between Grunewald and Colonel Edwin Emerson, whom McDonald claimed was a First World War German agent. FBI agents then sought to confirm these suspicions and whether Grunewald had liaised with Nye and Woodring to take advantage of their influence.<sup>20</sup>

Of more interest to FBI officials, however, was the fact that Grunewald was a political operative. On a regular basis he provided Hoover with inside political information. This relationship proved to be serendipitous for FBI agents' probe of Grunewald because, in June, Grunewald—unaware of the investigation—asked FBI agents to examine his telephone to ascertain if it had been tapped. "Believing this was a good opportunity to closely scrutinize Grunewald's apartment," FBI officials dispatched agents there on 2 July 1940. The FBI agents reported, however, that they had observed nothing "which would indicate that he was pro-German or anti-American in any manner in his sympathies."<sup>21</sup>

The FBI's investigations of Grunewald, Woodring, and Nye had, in the words of one agent, "failed to develop any substantiation of any of the charges made." Nevertheless, Hoover noted that the information FBI agents "developed relating not only to Senator Nye but to Mr. Woodring and Mr. Grunewald, has been of a negative nature." The FBI director then reported this "negative" information about Grunewald, Nye, and Woodring not only to Early—who had requested the investigation—but to the attorney general and his assistant, as well as Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau. Clearly, it only reinforced their negative opinions of Roosevelt's opposition.<sup>22</sup>

20. Personal and confidential letter, Hoover to Early, 27 June 1940, Official File 10-B, 146-A; affidavit of D. H. McArthur, 27 June 1940, FBI 65-6165-?. While the document number is unreadable, it can be found in Wayne S. Cole's papers at the HHL. Memorandum, Hoover to Early, 8 July 1940, Official File 10-B, 146-A, FDRL; memorandum, Hoover to attorney general, 9 July 1940, FBI 65-6165-12; memorandum, Hoover to McGuire, 9 July 1940, FBI 65-6165-12.

21. Memorandum, Hoover to Early, 8 July 1940, Official File 10-B, 146-A, FDRL.

22. Personal and confidential letter, Hoover to Early, 9 July 1940, with attached memorandum, 8 July 1940, Official File 10-B, 146-A, FDRL; memorandum, Hoover to attorney general, 9 July 1940, FBI 65-6165-12 (with attached 8 July memo); memorandum, Hoover

The significance of this episode, however, lies in Grunewald. From the investigation and Grunewald's unsolicited sharing of information with the FBI, Hoover realized the value of Grunewald as a source of political intelligence. A connected Washington political operative, Grunewald had connections to prominent personalities like Senator Nye, former White House aide Thomas Corcoran, and the conservative and politically active businessman Henry Marsh. When Grunewald shared political information with the FBI, Hoover accepted it without hesitation. And as the Great Debate intensified in 1941, Military Intelligence Division (MID) officials again warned the FBI that Grunewald "was the pay-off man for German agents in the United States" and that he was their liaison to various peace and subversive groups. Significantly, however, FBI Assistant Director D. Milton Ladd determined that MID "was merely resurrecting old information" already put to rest. Yet, anxious to capitalize on Grunewald's connections, Hoover nevertheless used this rehashed army information as the basis for authorizing a wiretap on Grunewald's telephone. The wiretap remained in place between 4 June and 3 September 1941 and yielded valuable political intelligence.<sup>23</sup>

Wiretapping was not a legal surveillance method. Since passage in 1934 of the Federal Communications Act, and until the 1968 Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act permitted wiretapping with a warrant, the interception of wire or radio communications by anyone was illegal. This law was even upheld by two companion Supreme Court decisions, *Nardone v. U.S.* (1937 and 1939), and Attorney General Robert Jackson, who in March 1940, publicly announced that the Justice Department would not sanction wiretapping. He pointed out that the FBI was not an OGPU—forerunner of the Soviet NKVD and KGB. In May 1940, however, with the war crisis mounting, President Roosevelt secretly authorized the use of wiretaps to avert "sabotage, assassinations, and 'fifth column' activities" but only in cases concerning "national defense" and "of persons suspected of subversive activities against the Government of the United

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to McGuire, 9 July 1940, FBI 65-6165-12 (with attached 8 July memo); letter, Morgenthau to Hoover, 17 July 1940, and personal and confidential letter with attached 8 July memo, Hoover to Morgenthau, 9 July 1940, Henry Morgenthau Diaries, vol. 283, pp. 188-97, FDRL. On Nye's reservations about the Stimson and Knox appointments see Doenecke, *Storm on the Horizon*, 103-4.

23. Memorandum, Ladd to Hoover, 7 February 1945, FBI 87-2755-287. It is also interesting to note that Grunewald was again wiretapped in 1945-46. Do Not File memorandum, Spear to Foxworth, 17 May 1941, FBI 62-116758; Do Not File memorandum, Timm to Foxworth, 6 June 1941, FBI 62-116758; Do Not File memorandum, Fitch to Foxworth, 25 July 1941, FBI 62-116758.

States, including spies.” Roosevelt furthermore wanted to limit this activity by keeping it to a “minimum” and limited “insofar as possible to aliens.” He authorized the attorney general to review and approve all proposed FBI wiretaps.<sup>24</sup>

Attorney General Jackson, however, wanted Hoover to maintain the record of these wiretaps. Hoover did this by maintaining a “memorandum book” of attorney general–authorized wiretaps in his office. By placing this responsibility with Hoover, Jackson effectively diminished his oversight role because he knew only of those wiretaps that Hoover reported to him. In fact, FBI officials could, and did, authorize wiretaps on their own authority without informing the attorney general.<sup>25</sup>

The exact number of wiretaps authorized by FBI officials is not known, but some can be documented. Wiretaps that were not authorized by the attorney general were not recorded in Hoover’s memorandum book; instead they were recorded on authorization cards that were maintained in the secret office files of Hoover’s lieutenants. In 1954, for reasons that are unknown, fifteen wiretap-authorization cards from the 1940s that had been filed in FBI Assistant Director Ladd’s office were transferred to the secret file of Assistant Director Louis Nichols. Even more curious, the FBI maintained as standard policy that wiretap-authorization cards be destroyed every six months, yet these cards somehow escaped destruction. Whatever happened, the cards nevertheless document the fact that FBI officials had developed a not insignificant level of investigative autonomy and did employ illegal wiretaps on their own during this period.<sup>26</sup>

Through the Grunewald wiretap, FBI agents developed no information substantiating the espionage charge against the private detective. Instead, they recorded critical and politically charged comments that various prominent individuals had made to Grunewald over the telephone. In September 1941, for example, Grunewald had a conversation with former

24. Federal Communications Act, 47 U.S.C. 605 (1934); Majority Opinion, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Owen J. Roberts, *Nardone v. United States*, 302 U.S. 397 (20 December 1937); Majority Opinion, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter, *Nardone v. United States*, 308 U.S. 338 (11 December 1939); “Justice Department Bans Wire Tapping; Jackson Acts on Hoover Recommendation,” *New York Times*, 18 March 1940; “FBI Is No OGPU, Jackson Asserts,” *New York Times*, 31 March 1940, 19; confidential memorandum, Franklin D. Roosevelt to Attorney General Robert Jackson, 21 May 1940, President’s Secretary’s File, Justice Department, FDRL.

25. Athan Theoharis, “FBI Wiretapping: A Case Study of Bureaucratic Autonomy,” *Political Science Quarterly* 107 (1992): 106.

26. Ibid.; fifteen wiretap authorization cards, Wiretapping Folder, Official and Confidential File of FBI Assistant Director Louis Nichols, FBI HQ, Washington, DC.

White House aide Thomas Corcoran during which Corcoran referred to Navy Secretary Knox as an “incompetent four-flusher,” and dismissed Naval intelligence officers as an “awfully snooty bunch.” Corcoran also commented to Grunewald that he believed Roosevelt only surrounded himself with “stuffed shirt” individuals. FBI agents also intercepted a conversation Grunewald had with Woodring concerning his desire to work with the pricing commission. These examples demonstrate that the Grunewald wiretap, instead of revealing Grunewald’s alleged espionage contacts, served instead as a unique source of political intelligence, and one that piqued Hoover’s interest. Yet beyond gathering political intelligence from the Grunewald wiretap, Hoover also received political information directly from the man himself. When the foreign policy debate between anti-interventionists and the Roosevelt administration became more hostile in 1941, the Grunewald source would prove useful in Hoover’s bid to ingratiate himself with the White House.<sup>27</sup>

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FBI Director Hoover did not only employ illegal wiretaps when collecting sensitive information about anti-interventionists, he also used special filing procedures to ensure that sensitive FBI records would not be disclosed publicly. Hoover’s “personal and confidential” letter system—discussed in chapter 1—was certainly used, but by 1940 he devised further creative filing methods. On 11 April 1940, Hoover instituted the “Do Not File” procedure whereby specially marked memoranda were not indexed and serialized in the FBI’s central records system. Instead they were maintained by Assistant FBI Director Ladd’s Domestic Intelligence Division permitting FBI officials to employ sensitive investigative techniques, such as illegal break-ins and wiretaps (note the Grunewald footnotes), and to create written records about them that would be secure.<sup>28</sup>

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FBI officials were interested in the political activities of various anti-interventionists, but particularly interested in them if their politics involved criticism of the FBI. In this regard, FBI officials found Senator

27. Personal and confidential memorandum, (deleted) to Tamm, 3 September 1941, FBI 65–6165–42.

28. Athan Theoharis, *The FBI and American Democracy* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 108–9.

Burton Wheeler of particular interest. As a long critic of the bureau, dating back to the Teapot Dome period, FBI officials considered Wheeler's views of the FBI suspicious. In terms of the foreign policy debate, FBI officials focused on Wheeler's public statements made in May of 1940 when he criticized the FBI in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. In reaction to Roosevelt's proposal to transfer the Immigration Bureau to the Justice Department after the "phony war," Senator Wheeler said the idea was terrible because another Justice Department agency—the FBI—was staffed by "a lot of cheap two-by-four detectives." Then, in June, the FBI's Seattle field office reported that an anonymous informant claimed that Wheeler had again publicly criticized the FBI. (Incidentally, at the time Wheeler was criticizing the Stimson and Knox appointments.) The informant claimed to have the ability to "shut Wheeler up" and inquired as to the bureau's interest in this. While the identity of the informant was never established, his call was considered important enough to report to Hoover. While Hoover always took a personal interest in his critics, those who criticized him while also criticizing the policy of the Roosevelt White House received special attention.<sup>29</sup>

In September 1940, amid fierce anti-interventionist opposition to conscription and the destroyers-for-bases deal, Hoover received information that by 1941 evolved into a far-reaching investigation into the activities of Senators Wheeler and Nye and Congressman Hamilton Fish. The episode gained life when the New York field office reported that direct mail advertiser Henry Hoke—publisher of the *Reporter of Direct Mail Advertising*—had accused various senators and congressmen of illegally distributing franked envelopes. (Congressmen have the right to mail speeches and other information to constituents postage-free.) These envelopes, which contained anti-interventionist literature, allegedly were sent to German Americans who subsequently mailed them en masse to Americans in an attempt to influence popular opinion. Hoke singled out Farm-Labor Senator Ernest Lundeen of Minnesota, Democratic Senator Rush Holt of West Virginia, Senator Nye, Republican Representative J. Thorkelson of Montana, and Representative Fish for using their frank in this manner. Hoover forwarded this information to the Justice Department's Neutrality Law Unit, and while at this time it generated no concern, by 1941 it would evolve into a controversy that for the anti-interventionist congressmen suggested—by association—that they had foreign links.<sup>30</sup>

29. "Wheeler Denounces FBI As '2-by-4' Detectives," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 31 May 1940, in Wheeler FBI file, number unreadable; memorandum, R. P. Kramer to Clegg, 1 June 1940, FBI 62–55261–3; Doenecke, *Storm on the Horizon*, 103, 104.

30. Personal and confidential letter, SAC New York to Hoover, 7 September 1940,



The following month, Hoover received further information about congressional franks, but this time it singled out Senator Wheeler. At the time, Wheeler was publicly criticizing the conscription bill—calling it dangerous—and opposing the destroyers-for-bases deal. The matter involved two dozen pieces of mail bearing Senator Wheeler's frank that had been delivered to a post office in Manchester, Connecticut. This franked mail reportedly contained anti-interventionist literature addressed to persons of German descent, and at least one franked envelope was addressed to the leader of the local Bund organization. Hoover reported this incident to the Justice Department "in view of the fact that this information was officially reported to a representative of this Bureau." The FBI did not have jurisdiction to investigate a matter involving the U.S. mail, yet Hoover's reporting of it illustrates his interest in reporting to the administration any derogatory information, even if unsubstantiated, about Roosevelt's critics.<sup>31</sup>

The franking issue was not the only time information surfaced to suggest Senator Wheeler may have had foreign links. Hoover also obtained unsubstantiated information in December 1940, which he shared with the White House, Treasury Department, and State Department, that the wife of a former German embassy counselor agreed to prepare a summary of information on Adolf Hitler and disarmament for Wheeler and Democratic Senator Millard Tydings. The information also indicated that the woman claimed to be "working with Mrs. Wheeler on this 'America First' organization." (The America First Committee became a national organization in December 1940.) This information, though uncorroborated, suggested to senior administration officials that Wheeler and other anti-interventionist critics had ties with Nazi Germany. Such information lent credence to popular perceptions that anti-interventionists were "subversives" and undoubtedly bolstered this view among officials in the White House. By providing such unsubstantiated information, Hoover was placed in good stead with the administration.<sup>32</sup>

There is evidence that the White House valued Hoover's political

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FBI 65-6030-21; memorandum, Hoover to Lawrence M. C. Smith, Chief, Neutrality Law Unit, 16 October 1940, FBI 65-6030-21; personal and confidential letter, SAC New York to Hoover, 15 August 1940, FBI (number illegible, but in Nye FBI file).

31. Memorandum, Hoover to attorney general, 18 October 1940, FBI 65-6030-3; personal and confidential memorandum, Hoover to Assistant to the Attorney General Matthew F. McGuire, 30 October 1940, FBI 146-7-3963; letter, SAC New Haven to Hoover, 10 October 1940, FBI 65-6030-4.

32. Blind memorandum, 31 December 1940, FBI 65-28688-115X1 attached to: personal and confidential letters, Hoover to Edwin M. Watson, Secretary to the President, Treasury Secretary, and Adolf A. Berle, 31 December 1940, FBI 65-28688-115X1.



intelligence reports. On 14 June 1940, President Roosevelt wrote a short note to the FBI director to thank him “for the many interesting and valuable reports that you have made to me regarding the last few months.” The president thought Hoover had “done and are doing a wonderful job, and I want you to know of my gratification and appreciation.” Hoover’s response to Roosevelt’s brief note illustrates his repeated efforts to ingratiate himself with the chief executive. Hoover expounded:

The personal note which you directed to me on June, 14, 1940, is one of the most inspiring messages which I have ever been privileged to receive; and, indeed, I look upon it as rather a symbol of the principles for which our Nation stands. When the President of our country, bearing the weight of untold burdens, takes the time to so express himself to one of his Bureau heads, there is implanted in the hearts of the recipients a renewed strength and vigor to carry on their tasks.

In noting the vast contrast between the Leader of our Nation and those of other less fortunate Nations, I feel deeply thankful that we have at the head of our Government one who possesses such sterling, sincere, and altogether human qualities.<sup>33</sup>

With such approval coming from the White House in 1940, it was perhaps with little surprise that during the following year the FBI’s surveillance efforts increased.



A significant development in 1940 that underscores the evolution of the domestic security state, and the special focus anti-interventionist critics received, was the formation of intimate ties between the FBI, British intelligence, and Canada’s Royal Canadian Mounted Police. If close ties among Western nations’ intelligence agencies was a hallmark of the Cold War–era National Security State, the origins of those ties certainly demonstrate the

33. Letter, Roosevelt to Hoover, 14 June 1940, Official File 10-B, FDRL; letter, Hoover to Roosevelt, 18 June 1940, President’s Personal File 4819, FDRL. Hoover also sent Roosevelt a similarly ingratiating letter in 1942 when the country was at war and after the president wrote a letter that was to be read to the graduates of the National Police Academy. Hoover was careful to point out that he “would be remiss in my duties if I did not tell you that the last several years under your administration have been some of the happiest years of my life. . . .” Letter, Hoover to Roosevelt, 25 July 1942, J. Edgar Hoover Folder, Official and Confidential Files of J. Edgar Hoover.

primacy of the domestic security state to its development. More narrowly, both the FBI and British intelligence—in the form of the British Security Coordination (BSC)—had a parallel interest in monitoring and, if possible, discrediting Roosevelt's anti-interventionist critics. FBI Director Hoover's interest was primarily bureaucratic—as a conservative operating in the Roosevelt administration—whereas the BSC's interest was in bringing the United States into the European war on the Allied side.

While the FBI-BSC relationship formed only in 1940, the FBI's relationship with British intelligence, in fact, dates back to the era of the First World War. At that time the Bureau of Investigation maintained a liaison with Sir William Wiseman, who served as Britain's intelligence representative in America. After the war there appears to have been little or no contact between officials of the FBI and British intelligence. Nevertheless, dating from 1937 the FBI began to maintain limited and unofficial contact starting with British Passport Control Officer Captain Sir James Paget—the usual cover for British intelligence—and with the British Purchasing Commission. By 1939, furthermore, Hoover reported to the White House that the FBI had enjoyed “for the past several years” an official liaison with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police “in the fields of plant protection, espionage and sabotage,” which yielded valuable information for the bureau. It was not until 1940, however, that the FBI would establish an official relationship with British intelligence when William Stephenson arrived in the United States to organize the BSC.<sup>34</sup>

William Stephenson was a Canadian citizen who distinguished himself during the First World War not only as a pilot but as an amateur lightweight boxing champion. (It would be his boxing connections that, ironically, provided Stephenson with a way to meet FBI Director Hoover.) More importantly, Stephenson became a highly successful businessman in Europe during the interwar period, which made him an invaluable asset not only to British intelligence—because he could provide them with information

34. Douglas M. Charles, “‘Before the Colonel Arrived’: Hoover, Donovan, Roosevelt and the Origins of American Central Intelligence,” *Intelligence and National Security* 20 (June 2005): 226. Hoover relayed some intelligence, about the security of Greenland, gleaned from Paget to Roosevelt: see personal and confidential letter, Hoover to Watson, 23 April 1940, Official File 10-B, FDRL. (This information, which Roosevelt read personally, apparently impressed the Canadian prime minister, Mackenzie King, in terms of the president's intelligence sources when Roosevelt shared it with him. See: personal and confidential letter, Hoover to Watson, 14 June 1940, Official File 10-B, FDRL.) On the FBI-RCMP connection see personal and confidential letter, Hoover to Watson, 2 December 1939; letter, S. T. Wood, Commissioner of the RCMP, to Hoover, 21 November 1939; letter, Watson to Hoover, 7 December 1939 all in Official File 10-B, FDRL.

about German munitions manufacturing—but to Winston Churchill, who used Stephenson as a source of information since he was out of favor during these “wilderness years.” After Churchill rose to the office of prime minister in May of 1940, because of his intimate and high-level contacts in the United States, British intelligence recruited Stephenson to be its intelligence representative there.<sup>35</sup>

Before Stephenson could set up shop in the United States, however, it was imperative that he first make contact with J. Edgar Hoover and the FBI. This he was able to do through a mutual friend, the celebrated boxer Gene Tunney, who had defeated Jack Dempsey for the heavyweight boxing championship in the 1920s. But Hoover refused to effect a formal and intimate liaison with a foreign intelligence organization that was to operate on American soil without the approval of the president. Further complicating things for Stephenson was the fact that Assistant Secretary of State Adolf Berle, head of the Interdepartmental Intelligence Conference, opposed strongly any intimate relationship with British intelligence. Because of this obstacle, Stephenson obtained Roosevelt’s assent through a mutual friend he had with the president, the wealthy New York aristocrat Vincent Astor. President Roosevelt then endorsed a liaison between the FBI and British intelligence, hoping that the two would work very closely together.<sup>36</sup>

Reportedly, Stephenson then negotiated the details of liaison with Hoover, sharing with him British information regarding the forthcoming Italian declaration of war on the Allies in 1940 which Hoover forwarded to the White House. Stephenson then traveled to London to coordinate with British intelligence authorities, and returned to New York City on 21 June 1940 to organize what would be named, by Hoover, the British Security Coordination. Located on Fifth Avenue within Rockefeller Center, Stephenson pieced together the BSC by hiring fifteen security officers and forty-five support personnel while maintaining close communications with Hoover. Stephenson’s mission, however, was threefold: to protect British property in America (especially after the formation of

35. Charles, “Before the Colonel Arrived,” 226–27; Anthony Cave Brown, “C”: *The Secret Life of Sir Stewart Menzies, Spymaster to Winston Churchill* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 262.

36. Thomas Troy, *Wild Bill and Intrepid: Donovan, Stephenson, and the Origin of CIA* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 39; H. Montgomery Hyde, *Secret Intelligence Agent* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1982), 82; Charles, “Before the Colonel Arrived,” 227. On American Anglophobia see John E. Moser, *Twisting the Lion’s Tail: American Anglophobia between the World Wars* (New York: New York University Press, 1999).

Lend-Lease in 1941), to monitor enemy activity, and to promote American intervention in the European war.<sup>37</sup>

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The FBI's monitoring of anti-interventionists between September 1939 and December 1940 consisted primarily of passive intelligence gathering, forwarding of complaints made against them to the Justice Department, and taking action on administration interest in anti-interventionist activity. But in each instance Hoover's primary motivation is clear. He was careful to develop any information or sources of information that might yield not corroboration or verified evidence of a crime but valuable political information. With such information at hand, the conservative FBI director could placate the desires of the liberal Roosevelt to ensure his bureaucratic position and increase the influence and power of the FBI. When the debate over American involvement in the European war increased dramatically by 1941, a time when anti-interventionists moved beyond advocating neutrality to directly criticizing Roosevelt's foreign policy, FBI investigative efforts increased significantly.

37. Charles, "Before the Colonel Arrived," 228. On the Italian information see personal and confidential letter, Hoover to Watson, 31 May 1940, Official File 10-B, FDRL. Memorandum, Winthrop Crane to Adolf Berle, 29 November 1941, State Department Central Files, Record Group 59, 800.01B11 registration/1140, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA); letter and list of BSC employees, Crane to Gordon, 12 February 1941, RG 59, 800.01B11 registration/1209, NARA; letter, R. L. Bannerman to Clark, 6 February 1941, RG 59, 841.01B11/191, NARA; letter, Berle to Sumner Welles, 31 March 1941, RG 59, 841.20211/23, NARA; *British Security Coordination: The Secret History of British Intelligence in the Americas, 1940-45* (London: St. Ermin's Press, 1998), xxvi-xxviii.

# Intensification

## The Lend-Lease Debate, America First, and Its Allies

*December 1940 to Summer 1941*

The debate between interventionists and so-called isolationists changed in late 1940 and extending into 1941. During the 1940 election cycle, the debate centered on the need to ensure neutrality and American defense, although each side held different positions. Both sides differed, for example, over conscription, yet the controversial measure was passed into law when framed as good for American defense. The destroyers-for-bases deal, too, was a controversial proposal, but when presented as beneficial to American security the American public largely accepted it. In the autumn of 1940, however, after the conclusion of the Battle of Britain and after Great Britain had experienced massive shipping losses due to German U-boats, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill informed Roosevelt that British dollar reserves were exhausted. No longer, Churchill warned, could his country pay cash to buy American supplies as stipulated in the revised Neutrality Act of 1939, popularly known as cash-and-carry. Complicating the British position was the 1934 Johnson Act that prevented Americans from extending loans to countries that had defaulted on their First World War debt.<sup>1</sup>

In order to ensure British access to American supplies, while avoiding violating the letter of the law as defined in the Neutrality and Johnson Acts, on 17 December 1940 President Roosevelt announced a new and innovative policy. To ensure continued British access to war matériel, Roosevelt proposed to “eliminate the dollar sign” from further orders. The president called his idea “lend-lease” and, to simplify the matter for

1. See Garry J. Clifford and Samuel R. Spencer Jr., *The First Peacetime Draft* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1986); William L. Langer and Everett S. Gleason, *The Challenge to Isolation, 1937–1940* (New York: Harper, 1952); Manfred Jonas, *Isolationism in America, 1935–1941*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Imprint Publications, 1990).

public consumption, employed the analogy of lending a garden hose to one's neighbor to extinguish his house fire. Just as he had done with conscription and destroyers-for-bases, Roosevelt argued that the proposal was in the interests of American defense because the security of Great Britain directly affected U.S. interests, particularly as its support would ensure that America would avoid another devastating war. Then, in January 1941, when delivering his State of the Union address, Roosevelt further couched lend-lease as a policy move that was intended to ensure the preservation of the four human freedoms: freedom of speech and expression, freedom from want, freedom of worship, and freedom from fear.<sup>2</sup>

Anti-interventionists mobilized in opposition to the president's proposal. Lend-lease, in particular, became a focal point for those who sought to avoid American involvement in war. No longer advocating neutrality in European affairs, as they had previously, anti-interventionists changed tactics to directly criticize administration policy. Significantly, the stakes were thereby raised because now they pointedly challenged the president's leadership and policy, raising themselves to the level of a serious political threat. Concern over the consequences of Roosevelt's new policy proposal, moreover, provided momentum for anti-interventionists to organize nationally and gave rise to the emergence of the America First Committee as the most significant, and best-funded, anti-interventionist pressure group.

While the America First Committee became nationally prominent only by late 1940, its origins date from earlier that year when Yale University law student R. Douglas Stuart Jr. formed the group as a student organization. Troubled by the events of early 1940, he sought the backing of his colleagues who included Gerald R. Ford (the future president) and Potter Stewart (the future Supreme Court justice), among others. By the autumn he had persuaded a number of Midwestern businessmen and leading Republican conservatives to help organize his group on a national level, in part, to oppose the interventionist Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies which was led by newspaperman William Allen White. With these goals in mind, the so-called America First Committee announced its formation in September 1940 and headquartered itself in Chicago.<sup>3</sup>

2. Wayne S. Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists, 1939–1945* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 411–13.

3. Wayne S. Cole, *America First: The Battle against Intervention, 1940–1941* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1953), 10–13; Justus D. Doenecke, ed., *In Danger Undaunted: The Anti-Interventionist Movement of 1940–1941 as Revealed in the Papers of the America First Committee* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1990), 7, 87–88.

The committee's primary objective was to undermine public support for President Roosevelt's increasingly interventionist foreign policy. To promote this objective, Stuart enlisted Robert E. Wood—chairman of Sears, Roebuck and Company—to serve as committee chairman. Over time, other prominent personalities joined the committee as well, including the wife of Senator Burton Wheeler, Alice Roosevelt Longworth, and Charles Lindbergh. Not pacifist, the group had four principal aims:

1. The United States must build an impregnable defense for America.
2. No foreign power, nor group of powers, can successfully attack a *prepared* America.
3. American democracy can be preserved only by keeping out of the European war.
4. "Aid short of war" weakens national defense at home and threatens to involve America in war abroad.<sup>4</sup>

After going national, the America First Committee expanded rapidly by opening chapters in cities and towns nationwide. It also sponsored anti-interventionist speakers both at rallies and on the radio, published anti-interventionist literature, and supplied information to members of Congress. As a result of such activities the America First Committee became the most influential and best-organized anti-interventionist political pressure group in the country. When it disbanded in December 1941, the committee had 450 local chapters and roughly 800,000 members.<sup>5</sup>

While the committee declared itself to be nonpartisan, its membership was composed mostly of those who were politically conservative. Irrespective of this makeup, various radical groups endorsed similar political platforms and goals. These included Nazis, Communists—until the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941—and anti-Semites. Yet despite the America First Committee's efforts to distance itself from these particular elements, many Americans equated these radicals with America First. The resulting negative popular perception then became one of the committee's most significant hindrances, and a basis on which the FBI would focus.<sup>6</sup>

4. Cole, *America First*, 13–15; America First aims as quoted in Wayne S. Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists, 1932–45* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 381. Emphasis in original.

5. Justus D. Doenecke, *The Battle against Intervention, 1939–1941* (Malabar, FL: Krieger Press, 1997), 9.

6. Doenecke, *In Danger Undaunted*, 16–17. For the committee's effort to distance itself from "Nazis, Bundists, Fascists, Silver Shirts, Christian Frontists, et cetera," see letter Robert

FBI officials shared the belief that the AFC's membership either held fascist sympathies or were dupes of the Nazis and they helped to sustain such views by submitting negative reports about them to the White House. They most likely held this view—perceiving anti-interventionists as “subversives” or “un-American”—in part because of the associations many had made between anti-interventionists and radical/fascist elements. This followed a popular outlook dating from the 1930s, and extending into the early Cold War, that identified Stalinism and Nazism as essentially identical totalitarian regimes. Hoover and other FBI officials apparently held such views and, coupled with popular perceptions of anti-interventionists as witting or unwitting Nazi dupes, may have regarded some fellow conservatives—foreign policy critics of Roosevelt—as domestic threats.<sup>7</sup>

As FBI agents accumulated increasing amounts of information about the AFC's alleged fascist leanings—all of it unsubstantiated—FBI officials either believed these allegations or found it politically expedient to forward intelligence to the administration that suggested its critics were, indeed, “subversive.” In short, FBI Director Hoover played to President Roosevelt's political interests. But at the start of their probe, at least, into America First, FBI agents found very little evidence to suggest the group had subversive connections. Throughout the entire course of the FBI's investigation, moreover, agents gathered information accurately showing that the AFC sought to exclude extreme elements from its ranks, but this information was subordinated to negative information, much of which was shared with the administration. As the foreign policy debate intensified, and as interventionist groups and advocates increased their invective toward anti-interventionists, the FBI's accumulation of unsubstantiated material suggesting AFC fascist links multiplied. This changing view is evident in FBI records. A 1942 summary report on the AFC concedes that the group's origins were “totally respectable” but, through time, it had evolved into a haven for fascists.<sup>8</sup>

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E. Wood to Edgar B. Stern, 17 June 1941, Robert E. Wood Papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library [HHL], West Branch, IA. An example of the America First Committee's conservative character can be found in: letter, Henry Regnery to Roy Cullen, 19 March 1953, Robert E. Wood Papers, HHL.

7. See Thomas R. Maddux, “Red Fascism, Brown Bolshevism: The American Image of Totalitarianism in the 1930s,” *Historian* 40 (November 1977): 85–103; Les K. Adler and Thomas G. Paterson, “Red Fascism: The Merger of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia in the American Image of Totalitarianism, 1930s–1950s,” *American Historical Review* 75 (April 1970): 1046–64.

8. Report, SAC Washington, DC, to FBI HQ, 26 May 1942, FBI 100–4712–384.



FBI agents first took notice of the AFC's political activities and suspicious connections on 9 November 1940. On that date the Birmingham, Alabama, special agent in charge (SAC) reported to Hoover that an informer had alerted him to a radio program, sponsored by America First, aired to discuss the war situation. The informant believed the program's content "indicated to him that it was a Nazi inspired program [that] he thought might be part of German propaganda." The Birmingham SAC forwarded this information "in the event the Bureau desires the Chicago office to make an inquiry." No further investigation was ordered, but the report illustrates that because of popular perceptions, even early on, agents focused not on clear and present threats but on unsubstantiated charges of illicit connections.<sup>9</sup>

By December 1940, FBI officials began to receive on a relatively limited basis further intelligence on America First. This information, which predated the forthcoming vociferous lend-lease debate, accurately reflected the AFC's political position. On 16 December, for example, FBI Assistant Director Louis Nichols—the head of the FBI's Crime Records Division and in this capacity Hoover's formal liaison to the media and Congress—authored a review of news reports that indicated that the America First Committee was "in favor of maintaining a strict cash and carry policy, a strict policy of neutrality, building adequate defenses and that they *would not tolerate any Communists or Fascists* in the group."<sup>10</sup>

Unsurprisingly, FBI agents at this point had not developed significant quantities of information on the America First Committee. The reason for the paucity of the information lies in the fact that the group had only just been formed and it devoted its resources to organizing itself while opposing the interventionist Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies. But when President Roosevelt announced in December 1940 his intention to create a new method to extend assistance to Great Britain, which became his lend-lease policy, the bureau's interest in the committee markedly deepened, owing to the committee's vigorous opposition to the president's initiative. The first summary memorandum on America First was created on 29 January 1941 for Assistant to the Director Edward A. Tamm. This summary outlined the committee's membership and noted particularly its political opposition to administration policies ranging from conscription, aid to Britain, and—most importantly—the lend-lease bill.<sup>11</sup>

9. Letter, E. P. Guinane to J. Edgar Hoover, 9 November 1940, FBI 100-4712-1.

10. Memorandum, Louis Nichols to Clyde Tolson, 16 December 1940, FBI 100-4712-3. Emphasis added.

11. Memorandum re America First Committee, J. B. O'Leary to Edward A. Tamm, 29

For the America First Committee and other anti-interventionists, the lend-lease bill became a focal point on which it would devote its resources. Committee chairman Robert E. Wood publicly vowed that his organization would oppose the presidential initiative “with all the vigor it can exert,” and he mobilized committee resources nationwide.<sup>12</sup> Reflecting the acrimony surrounding the debate, Senator Wheeler—ally to the AFC and the most aggressive anti-interventionist senator in 1941—referred to lend-lease as “the New Deal’s triple A foreign policy—it will plow under every fourth American boy.” (The president responded to Wheeler saying that his remark was the “rottenest,” most “dastardly,” and “unpatriotic” thing he had ever heard.) After the bill was introduced in Congress, Wood, former Undersecretary of State William Castle, and leading Republican Hanford MacNider—all prominent America First members—were invited by Congressman Hamilton Fish to testify before Congress in opposition to the measure. The committee’s tactic was to mobilize public sentiment to persuade congressmen to vote it down. Accordingly, the committee sponsored hundreds of meetings, distributed newsletters and petitions, and paid for position papers in major newspapers, which were then reprinted in the *Congressional Record*, urging opposition. By the end of February 1941, at the height of the lend-lease debate, the America First Committee had organized some 648 “embryonic chapters” across the nation.<sup>13</sup>

Vigorous anti-interventionist opposition notwithstanding, the House voted in favor of the lend-lease bill on 8 February by the comfortable margin of 260 to 165. The debate then shifted to the Senate where the America First Committee redoubled its opposition efforts. The Senate debate lasted through March and was one of the most heated in American history. In the interim, FBI Director Hoover, despite the fact that the White House was receiving political updates from its congressional floor managers, provided the administration with advance political intelligence on both the Senate debate and the influence America First had during it. On 21 February, Hoover informed Presidential Secretary Edwin Watson that he had learned through a “strictly confidential source” that “the debate in

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January 1941, FBI 100–4712–6. The bureau followed this memorandum up with a more detailed, yet still limited, description of America First and its leaders. See memorandum re America First Committee, 7 February 1941, FBI 100–4712–10.

12. Robert Wood quoted in Doenecke, *In Danger Undaunted*, 22.

13. Doenecke, *In Danger Undaunted*, 23; America First Committee Washington News Letter #1, 31 January 1941, reprinted in Doenecke, *In Danger Undaunted*, 226–27. On Wheeler’s status as an anti-interventionist see Wayne S. Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists, 1932–45* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 458.

the Senate on the Lend-Lease Bill will last for about two weeks longer.” Eleven senators, Hoover also reported, planned to filibuster the measure in an attempt to undermine its passage. His effort to keep the president informed on political matters involving prominent policy critics reflected Hoover’s larger interest in promoting the interests of the administration for the betterment of his own, and the FBI’s, position.<sup>14</sup>

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When Charles Lindbergh joined with America First in opposition to lend-lease, FBI agents redoubled their efforts in monitoring his activities. He received special FBI attention at this point because he had assumed a prominent role in the debate. Lindbergh was invited to testify before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee who were considering the president’s bill. (The lend-lease bill had been submitted to both houses of Congress simultaneously.) Lindbergh’s appearances at these hearings were a popular draw. Lend-lease, he argued, would weaken American defenses by sending needed supplies to Britain which would only lead to war and create “conditions in our own country as bad or worse than those we now desire to overthrow in Nazi Germany.” His testimony and resultant lobbying efforts were closely reported by the press, leading even some anti-interventionists to regard his views as too controversial.<sup>15</sup>

During the debate, moreover, Charles Lindbergh shifted his political tactics to directly criticize in sworn testimony the administration’s policy. Then, in April, the aviator joined the America First Committee to oppose Roosevelt’s foreign policy. Reflecting the intensity of sentiment about the nation’s foreign policy course, President Roosevelt made a cursory remark at a press conference equating Lindbergh with the Civil War copperhead Clement Vallandigham—a northerner with pro-southern sympathies who was critical of President Abraham Lincoln. An insulted Lindbergh then sent to Roosevelt a public letter announcing his resignation from the Army Air Corps Reserve. In the midst of these tensions, FBI monitoring of Lindbergh only intensified. Now that Lindbergh, already the most popular anti-interventionist, had joined the most influential and powerful anti-

14. Personal and confidential letter, J. Edgar Hoover to Edwin M. Watson, 21 February 1941, Official File 10-B, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library (FDRL), Hyde Park, NY.

15. As quoted in Cole, *Charles A. Lindbergh*, 92–93. The best account of the Lend-lease Act is Warren F. Kimball, *The Most Unsordid Act: Lend-Lease, 1939–1941* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1969).

interventionist pressure group—the America First Committee—providing Roosevelt with political intelligence or working to undermine this critic became increasingly more important to FBI officials.<sup>16</sup>

While Roosevelt might have compared Lindbergh to the Civil War-era copperheads, others likened the aviator to Abraham Lincoln. FBI officials took an interest in this comparison in relation to the president's lend-lease bill and who compared Lindbergh to Lincoln: right-wing extremists like Gerald Winrod. FBI agents abstracted a story from the right-wing Kansas newspaper *Publicity* that likened "Colonel Charles A. Lindbergh, by his courageous stand against 1776 [the lend-lease bill] may prove to be this nation's man on a white horse. Just the individual to ride roughshod into the nation's capitol in 1944 [an election year]." Seemingly confirming their view of Lindbergh as sympathetic to these elements, FBI officials noted "that to date, Col. Lindbergh has not objected to such use of his name."<sup>17</sup>

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FBI officials took advantage of every opportunity to collect political intelligence on the America First Committee. In February 1941—although this was not reported to FBI headquarters until June—the head of the FBI's Kansas City, Missouri, field office obtained permission from the editor of the *Kansas City Star* to search that newspaper's files for information relating to America First. This review uncovered the following controversial political comments made by leading anti-interventionists. Committee Chairman Robert Wood reportedly said: "Democracy is not going to work unless men stand up for their convictions." Anti-interventionist John T. Flynn, a journalist who wrote about financial affairs and who "bitterly opposed the Administrative [*sic*] policy," reportedly said the administration was proactively pushing the country toward war. Finally, a member of the local America First chapter reportedly said: "Nazism and Democracy could live side by side" and said nothing else "except in criticism of President Roosevelt's foreign policy."<sup>18</sup>

The bureau's best opportunity to gather intelligence on the America First Committee came, however, during the first half of 1941 from none other than the committee itself. In January and then again in March, in

16. Ibid.

17. Blind memorandum re Col. Charles Lindbergh, 2 May 1941, FBI 65-11449-64.

18. Report, America First Committee, by SAC Kansas City, Missouri, 18 June 1941, FBI 100-4712-75. On Flynn see Ronald Radosh, *Prophets on the Right: Profiles of Conservative Critics of American Globalism* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975), 197-273.

an effort to assuage the popular notion that it was a subversive organization, the Chicago chapter invited FBI agents to examine its files. Chester Bowles, an anti-interventionist New York advertising executive, suggested that every local chapter request FBI checks of their files to “keep its skirts completely clean so far as anti-Semitism and Fascism, either domestic or foreign, are concerned.” While perfectly willing to have FBI agents collect intelligence on the committee in confidence, as in the opportunity with the *Kansas City Star*, Hoover hesitated to have FBI agents publicly examine the files of a political group that opposed the Roosevelt administration. According to historian Justus Doenecke, however, the FBI eventually did examine the Chicago chapter’s files (in June) but refused to peruse other chapters’ records. Word then spread of the Chicago chapter’s request which resulted in at least one government agency—the Office of Price Management—asking Hoover for a copy of the America First Committee’s membership list so it could check the names against those of new applicants. Hoover, according to FBI documents, told the OPM official that his bureau had no such lists.<sup>19</sup>

Meanwhile, on 26 and 27 February, Hoover forwarded to the administration different political intelligence regarding John Wheeler, the son of the prominent anti-interventionist senator and chairman of the Los Angeles branch of America First. The FBI director reported that John Wheeler’s wife—also a leading member of America First—said in reference to lend-lease: “the only way we can be safe is to see the pins knocked

19. Letter, Chester Bowles to R. Douglas Stuart Jr., 28 November 1941 in Doenecke, *In Danger Undaunted*, 107–8; Justus D. Doenecke, *Storm on the Horizon: The Challenge to American Intervention, 1939–1941* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 276; Cole, *America First*, 117–18; letter, A. H. Johnson to Hoover, 4 June 1942, FBI 100–4712–411; memorandum, D. M. Ladd to Hoover, 27 September 1941, FBI 100–4712–179; memorandum, D. M. Ladd to E. A. Tamm, 17 October 1941, FBI 100–4712–202; memorandum, Clyde Tolson to Hoover, 24 September 1941, FBI 100–4712–165; memorandum, Louis Nichols to Tolson, 1 October 1941, FBI 100–4712–175. It should be noted that Hoover made a practice of officially denying access to FBI files and creating a record saying as much, while at the same time providing these files to trusted recipients. By late 1942, with America already militarily involved in the Second World War, FBI officials were more than willing to share information with government agencies. In September a Treasury Department official, Samuel Klaus, solicited any FBI records concerning the America First Committee. (The reason for his interest is unknown, as the bureau has redacted portions of the document.) In this instance, under the orders of FBI Assistant Director D. Milton Ladd, head of the bureau’s Domestic Intelligence Division, an FBI report was given to Klaus that “had all identifying marks linking it with the Bureau obliterated therefrom.” From the FBI document number cited in the FBI memorandum, however, we know that the information had something to do with America First Committee records which FBI officials had somehow secured. Memorandum, J. K. Mumford to D. Milton Ladd, 16 October 1942, FBI 100–4712–472.

out from under Britain.” Such a statement suggested to FBI officials that Wheeler’s wife had “become imbued with pro-German sentiments because of her association with various individuals . . . [all of] whom are under investigation by this Bureau.” Beyond the statements and alleged sympathies of Mrs. Wheeler, FBI agents also noted that John Wheeler had accepted a \$2,000 check for the Los Angeles America First group from an individual under FBI scrutiny.<sup>20</sup>

The following month, utilizing a blind memorandum, Hoover reported further political intelligence to the White House concerning the Los Angeles branch of America First. Again, he noted the activities of the Wheelers, but also those of the revisionist historian Harry Elmer Barnes who had actively campaigned in the region against lend-lease. Taken together, the content of the two reports confirm that Hoover’s interest was to forward not information concerning criminal activities but political intelligence to either sustain or create the impression that America First members had links to questionable—in effect subversive—individuals. At the same time that FBI agents were collecting this type of derogatory data, other agents were collecting exculpatory information that indicated the America First Committee had *no* subversive links or that it actively sought to distance itself from such elements—such as Louis Nichols’s December 1940 memorandum to Tolson reporting as much. Nevertheless, Hoover chose not to forward Nichols’s memorandum or any other exculpatory data to the White House, whereas he did the other.<sup>21</sup>

Satisfied with Hoover’s providing of unsolicited political intelligence reports, by the start of the lend-lease debate President Roosevelt eventually requested an FBI investigation of the America First Committee. In February 1941, the president learned of an America First circular captioned: “Are you willing to give up democracy?” This document characterized lend-lease as “a war dictatorship bill” that would ultimately bestow upon the president “absolute power.” Disturbed by this circular, on 21 February, Roosevelt asked Stephen Early to “find out from someone—perhaps FBI—who is paying for this?”<sup>22</sup>

20. Personal and confidential letter and blind memorandum, J. Edgar Hoover to Edwin Watson, 26 February 1941, Official File 10-B, FDRL; personal and confidential letter and memorandum, Hoover to Adolf A. Berle, 27 February 1941, FBI 100-4712-7X; personal and confidential letter and memorandum, Hoover to Matthew F. McGuire, 27 February 1941, FBI 100-4712-7X; personal and confidential memorandum, J. Edgar Hoover to Attorney General, 27 February 1941, FBI 100-4712-14X.

21. Blind memorandum re America First Committee, 3 March 1941, FBI 100-4712-17X.

22. America First Committee circular, FBI 100-4712-18; memorandum, Roosevelt to

Early passed Roosevelt's request on to Hoover, who ordered an immediate reply. The director ordered a summary memorandum on America First to be prepared for the White House, but if the president's "specific question [was] not answered," to tell him "it is being checked and he will be further advised." By 1 March, Hoover had provided the White House with a memorandum that summarized the AFC's leadership and noted that the group's financial sources stemmed solely from "volunteer contributions by those interested in the organization."<sup>23</sup>

Roosevelt's request asked Hoover to uncover who was "paying for this [circular]." Hoover's response, however, exceeded the limits of Roosevelt's original interest; and instead Hoover launched a full-scale investigation into the funding of not the committee's anti-lend-lease campaign but of the entire America First Committee. At this point, because FBI agents had developed only a limited amount of information in this area, Hoover was unwilling to initiate a further probe without some kind of tacit White House approval. As such, the FBI director wrote Early suggesting a course he would take in order to satisfy the president: "If it is the president's wish that a more exhaustive investigation be made relative to the means by which the America First Committee is being financed, *I hope you will not hesitate* to call upon me to conduct such an investigation." Early passed on Hoover's response to the president, employing Hoover's interpretation of Roosevelt's request—"source of funds and organizational data of the America First Committee"—to describe the information. Roosevelt did not immediately respond to Hoover's suggestion, but over subsequent months Hoover continued to volunteer information alluding to the questionable sources of America First's funding.<sup>24</sup>

The lend-lease debate, which had breathed life into the anti-interventionist movement and in particular the America First Committee, was settled when in March the Senate approved the measure and the president signed it into law. The end of the single most-debated issue during the Great Debate did not, however, lead FBI officials to halt their surveillance of administration critics. On the contrary, on 19 March, Hoover volunteered to the president and the attorney general what he described as "the contemplated plans of the America First Committee." According

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Early, 21 February 1941, FBI 100-4712-18.

23. Handwritten note on routing slip, Hoover to K. R. McIntire, 26 February 1941, FBI 100-4712-18; blind summary memorandum re America First Committee, no date, FBI 100-4712-18; memorandum, Early to Roosevelt, 4 March 1941, Official File 4330, FDRL.

24. Memorandum, Early to Roosevelt, 4 March 1941, Official File 4330, FDR; letter, Hoover to Early, 1 March 1941, FBI 100-4712-18. Emphasis added.



to Hoover the committee planned “to have Senators, Congressmen, and various peace and patriotic organizations travel throughout the United States to reach all areas for the purpose of opposing any plans the President might have in bringing this country into war.” Hoover further informed the administration that “three Senators and several Congressmen” would assist America First in the northern United States while “a similar train-load” would cover the south. A third group would travel cross-country to help spread the committee’s anti-Roosevelt message. In summarizing the plan for the president, Hoover noted that it was to be led by America First Committee chairman Wood and Senator Wheeler.<sup>25</sup>

The FBI director’s information was accurate and, more significantly, confirms his interest in the committee’s political activities in relation to the president’s foreign policy. Shortly after passage of the Lend-Lease Act, despite America First having suddenly found itself in “financial straits” as a result of its public opposition to the bill, Senator Wheeler and others indeed toured the country to oppose Roosevelt, as reported by the *Chicago Tribune* in April 1941. This tour raised both funds to continue their anti-interventionist fight and to spread further the committee’s message.<sup>26</sup>

The Roosevelt administration showed interest—if somewhat belatedly—in Hoover’s providing of information on America First’s post-lend-lease political efforts. In September, following the sinking of the USS *Greer* and Roosevelt’s subsequent shoot-on-sight order and extension of the neutrality zone to Iceland, Attorney General Francis Biddle—one of the recipients of Hoover’s report on America First’s “contemplated plans”—requested that FBI agents monitor an America First rally in Los Angeles at which Senator Wheeler was to speak. Biddle was interested in the size of the crowd and how it reacted to Wheeler’s speech. Hoover reported back to Biddle—and Roosevelt—that the crowd numbered between eight and eleven thousand and appeared “very sympathetic and friendly toward the America First Committee and Senator Wheeler.”<sup>27</sup>

25. Personal and confidential letter, Hoover to Edwin M. Watson, 19 March 1941, Official File 10-B, FDRL; personal and confidential memorandum, Hoover to Biddle, 19 March 1941, FBI 100-4712-20; blind memorandum, 19 March 1941, FBI 100-4712-20.

26. Letter, Robert E. Wood to Herbert Hoover, 8 July 1941, Robert E. Wood Papers, HHL; *Chicago Daily Tribune* (21 April 1941). For an itinerary of some of the tours see letter, Robert E. Wood to R. Douglas Stuart, 16 April 1941, and Robert L. Bliss to All Chapters, 14 April 1941, America First Committee Papers, Box 57, Hoover Institution Archives [HIA], Stanford University.

27. Memorandum, Ladd to Hoover, 27 September 1941, FBI 100-4712-170; report, SAC Los Angeles to Hoover, 3 October 1941, FBI 100-4712-158; memorandum, Hoover to Biddle, 8 October 1941, FBI 100-4712-158; personal and confidential letter, Hoover to



By late August, Hoover received another request for information on America First, but not from the White House. This time, Senator Claude Pepper, a Democrat from Florida and a vociferous critic of the anti-interventionists, requested information about the America First Committee from the attorney general. Biddle forwarded the request to Hoover. Normally unwilling to provide political intelligence to congressmen unless they could be trusted not to reveal the FBI as their source, Hoover honored this request. (He honored it because the request came via his superior in the Justice Department and not directly from Pepper.) Hoover forwarded an eleven-page blind memorandum—a document with no letterhead or indication of the sender or recipient—on the America First Committee to Biddle, who subsequently provided it to Pepper. The document, designated secret, examined the group's origins and contained biographical sketches of its leaders and prominent members, and other sundry political intelligence on Roosevelt's opponents.<sup>28</sup>

The following month, Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox—a frequent critic of the anti-interventionists—contacted FBI Assistant Director Tamm to obtain information about America First. Knox's concern stemmed from his belief that the committee was trying “to frustrate the National Defense Effort through manipulation of trade unions in bringing about labor disputes.”<sup>29</sup> Convinced that subversive elements had contributed to labor troubles, Knox identified some of these in the America First Committee. Indeed, he confided to his diary on 28 May 1941: “One of the first things the President must do . . . is to take positive action against the various forms of subversive activity which are interfering with and interrupting and delaying our defense preparations. Unless his fine words are followed by firm action the last condition will be worse than the first.”<sup>30</sup> On 3 September, Tamm responded by forwarding to the navy secretary “a blind memorandum containing information in our files with respect to

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Watson, 13 October 1941, FBI 100-4712-158.

28. Confidential memorandum, Biddle to Hoover, 28 August 1941, FBI 100-4712-127; confidential memorandum, Hoover to Biddle, 3 September 1941, FBI 100-4712-127; confidential and secret blind summary memorandum re America First Committee, 29 August 1941, FBI 100-4712-127.

29. Memorandum, Assistant Director Edward A. Tamm to Hoover, 3 September 1941, FBI 100-4712-132.

30. Entry for 28 May 1941, Frank Knox Diary, Papers of Frank Knox, Box 1, Library of Congress, Washington, DC. See also Francis MacDonnell, *Insidious Foes: The Axis Fifth Column and the American Home Front* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 80-81; Joan Jensen, *Army Surveillance in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 217.

The America First Committee.” This blind memorandum was similar in content to that forwarded to Senator Pepper.<sup>31</sup>

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As the lend-lease debate evolved and raged in Washington, D.C., the FBI’s relationship with British intelligence grew closer. During the winter of 1940–41, two FBI representatives—senior FBI official Hugh Clegg and FBI agent Lawrence Hince—traveled to London to survey the various British intelligence apparatuses. The FBI men were granted access to high-ranking British intelligence officials in both the British domestic Security Service, Secret Intelligence Service (the British foreign intelligence organization), and the Government Code and Cypher School (the British communications intelligence organization). They were also able to report on the visit of Harry Hopkins whom Roosevelt had dispatched to London to foster a closer British and American relationship before the enactment of lend-lease; Hoover reported to the president that Hopkins had succeeded well in his mission.<sup>32</sup>

In March 1941, after the FBI representatives’ return to the United States, Hoover sent Roosevelt two memoranda detailing the organization and methods of both the British Security Service and Secret Intelligence Service, as well as the probable postwar plans of the British. His purpose was undoubtedly to show the FBI’s value in the intelligence field as part of a long effort to cultivate for himself a future role in foreign intelligence. Two month later, moreover, Hoover sent Roosevelt another report that stemmed from the FBI mission to London. This time, the FBI director outlined for the president the means of British censorship. What FBI officials learned from the British here became particularly important after the Pearl Harbor attack, when Hoover outlined for the president the steps he took in terms of wartime censorship. What Hoover did was based, in part, on what his agents had learned from the British and reveal—to us—that the FBI obtained significant information from British and Canadian sources. Moreover, as will be seen, British intelligence worked to discredit the same

31. Memorandum, Kramer to Tamm, 3 September 1941, FBI 100–4712–154; personal and confidential letter, Hoover to Knox, 3 September 1941, FBI 100–4712–154; confidential and secret blind summary memorandum re America First Committee, 29 August 1941, FBI 100–4712–154; letter, Knox to Hoover, 8 September 1941, FBI 100–4712–135.

32. Douglas M. Charles, “‘Before the Colonel Arrived’: Hoover, Donovan, Roosevelt and the Origins of American Central Intelligence, 1940–41,” *Intelligence and National Security* 20 (June 2005): 229–31.

anti-interventionist individuals and organizations that FBI agents targeted. Whether there was any collaboration between the FBI and the BSC in this regard remains unknown because no records have been released in either the United States or the United Kingdom, but given the intimate contacts between the two groups (even if tense) tantalizing questions are raised about the nature of the Great Debate that to date cannot be resolved.<sup>33</sup>

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Three months after the conclusion of the lend-lease debate, when arguments shifted to the use of convoys and “neutrality patrols,” FBI agents—still very much interested in the activities of Roosevelt’s prominent critics—monitored an America First rally in Philadelphia where Lindbergh was the principal speaker. FBI agents were dispatched to the rally and, according to their own report, “circulated in the crowd without revealing their identities to anyone.” The agents noted who spoke at the meeting and described the demeanor of the crowd as “orderly, though enthusiastic.” The agents’ report included a newspaper clipping on the rally, and concluded “that the America First Committee was gaining in strength and that undoubtedly there were more people present for the America First Meeting than there were for the [Fiorello] LaGuardia protest meeting the night before.”<sup>34</sup>

FBI officials were so interested in Lindbergh’s political activity following lend-lease that they took advantage of nearly any opportunity to gauge “his sentiments in connection with the international policy of the United States Government.” In October 1941, at the start of the debate over revision of the Neutrality Act to arm merchant ships, the head of the FBI’s Detroit field office, John Bugas, obtained from an informer in the Ford Motor Company a private letter Lindbergh had written to Henry Ford that suggested his “sentiments.” The part of the letter that most interested FBI officials read:

I am continuing to take an active part in opposing the propaganda and agitation for war. The country is still opposed to our entry, but I am not

33. Charles, “Before the Colonel Arrived,” 231–32; personal and confidential letter and memorandum, 3 May 1941, Official File 10-B, FDRL; personal and confidential letter, 9 December 1941, and memorandum re: censorship, 8 December 1941, Official File 10-B, FDRL.

34. Letter and enclosures, J. F. Sears to J. Edgar Hoover, 10 June 1941, FBI 65–11449–66. La Guardia headed the Office of Civilian Defense, which sought to create American unity and discredit anti-interventionists. See Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists*, 12.

sure how long the people will be able to withstand the misinformation and propaganda that fills our press, our radio, and our motion-picture theaters each day. It is difficult to see how democracy can function intelligently or even survive without any accurate source of information to which the people can go, and from which they can base their decisions.

In August 1942 FBI officials incorporated this pilfered letter as part of an internal summary memorandum demonstrating Lindbergh's political sympathies.<sup>35</sup>

An opportunity to undermine Lindbergh directly, however, presented itself to FBI officials five months before—on 26 May 1941—when a Texas man, Marvin E. Rutherford, volunteered information to agents at the bureau's Dallas field office. An engineer and inventor, Rutherford held a variety of patents on mechanical devices and one of his inventions was at the center of his complaint to the FBI. In 1939 the engineer had designed a bulletproof self-sealing aviation fuel tank and had forwarded his designs to Charles Lindbergh, who, at the time, was chair of the air corps's New Device Committee. Having received no acknowledgment from the air corps about his plans—Rutherford had sent them via registered mail—he returned to California to continue his work on aircraft mechanisms at the Lockheed laboratory.<sup>36</sup>

While working in California, Rutherford read a newspaper article in the *Los Angeles Examiner* written by General Henry Arnold of the Army Air Corps that described, in detail, a bulletproof self-sealing aviation fuel tank that was found within Luftwaffe airplane wreckage in England during 1940. Disturbed by the timing of his forwarding of plans to Lindbergh in 1939 and this subsequent discovery, Rutherford concluded that Lindbergh—who after lend-lease was roundly being criticized as pro-Nazi—must have secretly passed his plans to Nazi Germany. He told FBI agents that the design, as laid out in the newspaper article, was nearly identical to the plans he had developed two years before. He further reported that as of 1941 the United States had only just begun production of this type of aviation fuel tank and that he had not patented his designs so as

35. Letter, John S. Bugas to J. Edgar Hoover, 20 October 1941, FBI 65-11449-94; letter, Charles A. Lindbergh to Henry Ford, 2 August 1941, FBI 65-11449-94; summary memorandum re Charles A. Lindbergh, by D. Milton Ladd, 21 August 1942, p. 17, FBI 65-11449-154.

36. Letter, Bernard H. Thomas, U.S. Department of Commerce, Patent and Trademark Office to author, 5 November 1993; Letter, A. P. Kitchin to J. Edgar Hoover, 27 June 1941, FBI 65-11449-74.

to prevent anyone else (i.e., enemy agents) from copying them. Rutherford also claimed that unidentified persons had unsuccessfully attempted to steal other technological information from his home. The engineer further feared that his house was subjected to, what he called, a “shake down” at the time he had mailed his designs to Lindbergh.<sup>37</sup>

When the SAC of the Dallas field office forwarded this information to FBI headquarters, Hoover sought the Justice Department’s counsel. Because this information was received from an unsolicited source, Hoover asked the assistant to the attorney general, Matthew F. McGuire, “if you would advise this Bureau what action, if any, should be taken.” McGuire in turn solicited the response of the head of the department’s Criminal Division, Assistant Attorney General Wendell Berge. Berge responded that “there is no evidence of a violation of a Federal criminal statute” and he “suggested that no further investigation be made in this matter.” McGuire thereupon advised Hoover: “No investigation should, therefore, be made.” Hoover, in turn, formally advised his Dallas SAC not to investigate “in the premises.”<sup>38</sup>

From a legal standpoint, the issue seemed closed. The Justice Department had determined the evidence did not warrant an investigation and, indeed, the Espionage Act only went into effect after a declaration of war. The conspiracy statute possibly could have been employed, but Justice Department attorneys found no actionable evidence. Despite this, however, the matter did not cease being investigated. Whereas the FBI had suspended *its* official probe since no prosecution was possible with their evidence, army intelligence continued the investigation. Hoover, the astute bureaucrat that he was, informed the Military Intelligence Division of the matter and let them investigate. In return, MID kept the FBI director appraised. Hoover had exploited presidential directives of 1936 and 1939 that required the FBI to take charge of “espionage, sabotage, and violations of the neutrality regulations” and to coordinate its intelligence with MID, Naval Intelligence, and the State Department. The end result was that the probe continued since the FBI director succeeded in bypassing Justice

37. Letter, A. P. Kitchin to J. Edgar Hoover, 27 June 1941, FBI 65-11449-74. On the popular image of Lindbergh as a Nazi see chapter 18, “Is Lindbergh a Nazi?” in Cole, *Charles A. Lindbergh*, 142-53. Cole concluded the aviator was many things but not a Nazi.

38. Memorandum, J. Edgar Hoover to Assistant to the Attorney General Matthew F. McGuire, 18 July 1941, FBI 65-11449-74; memorandum, Assistant Attorney General Wendell Berge to Matthew F. McGuire, 26 July 1941, (FOIAed document) Wayne S. Cole Papers, HHL; memorandum, Matthew F. McGuire to J. Edgar Hoover, 29 July 1941, FBI 65-11449-80; letter, J. Edgar Hoover to SAC Dallas, 20 August 1941, FBI 65-11449-80.

Department's restrictions, hoping, thereby, that MID could successfully develop the information.<sup>39</sup>

On 31 October, Brigadier General Sherman Miles, head of army intelligence, advised Hoover that MID officials had confirmed that Rutherford had sent his aviation fuel tank designs to Lindbergh via the air corps's New Device Committee. With the assistance of post office inspectors, MID officials had even located the individual who had received the package. By November, they concluded that Lindbergh had "received the plans but that no record is contained at the present time in the War Department files." Further, air corps officials had "written to Lindbergh requesting the plans or an explanation as to the disposition of them." While FBI documents do not indicate Lindbergh's response, the investigation—apparently proceeding nowhere—was closed. This incident nevertheless illustrates the lengths to which FBI Director Hoover went, bypassing Justice Department guidelines, to develop intelligence that could be useful in discrediting one of the administration's most prominent and successful critics. If FBI agents could have developed a case against Lindbergh he would have been shown to be unpatriotic, if not treasonous, and his credibility as a critic would have been undermined. As it turned out, this never materialized.<sup>40</sup>

The Rutherford complaint was not unique to the FBI's probe of Charles Lindbergh. In February 1942, the FBI's San Francisco office reported that immigration inspector M. Bertrand Couch had filed a complaint similar to Rutherford's. In 1930, Couch claimed that he had sent Lindbergh plans for a "propellerless plane" invented by his friend Jim Allis. Couch sent the plans to Lindbergh, who at the time was an adviser to Trans-World Airline, "for an expression of opinion as to practicality and commercial possibilities." In January 1942, the immigration inspector read an article in the *San Francisco Examiner* that described a jet aircraft (i.e., a propellerless plane) used in Fascist Italy and he, like Rutherford, came to suspect Lindbergh's motives. In this instance, however, with the United States already at war and the anti-interventionists all but discredited, the FBI took no action.<sup>41</sup>

Beyond trying to develop information to prosecute Lindbergh, FBI

39. Strictly confidential memorandum, J. Edgar Hoover to Edward Tamm, 10 September 1936; press release, J. Edgar Hoover to All Law Enforcement Officials, 6 September 1939, both reprinted in Athan Theoharis, ed., *From the Secret Files of J. Edgar Hoover* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1991), 182–84.

40. Confidential letter with attached memorandum, Brigadier General Sherman Miles to Lt. Col. J. Edgar Hoover, 31 October 1941, FBI 65–11449–99; memorandum, G. C. Burton to D. Milton Ladd, 26 November 1941, FBI 65–11449–104. On the army's role in political surveillance see Joan M. Jensen, *Army Surveillance in America, 1775–1980* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991).

41. Letter, N. J. L. Pieper to J. Edgar Hoover, 14 February 1942, FBI 65–11449–129.

officials also collected derogatory intelligence about him. Gathering such information had nothing to do with a violation of federal statutes. Its only possible value was that it could be disseminated to discredit Lindbergh. FBI agents usually culled such information from bureau informers and then relayed it to FBI headquarters in a secure manner, such as with Hoover's "personal and confidential" letter system whereby sensitive data was sent directly to the FBI director's office and bypassed the bureau's central records system. One example of the collection of such derogatory intelligence occurred in June 1941 when W. G. Banister—the FBI's special agent in charge at Butte, Montana—advised Hoover that while Lindbergh was on a barnstorming tour in Montana during the 1920s he had "lived in the home of a prostitute for a considerable time and associated with the prostitute's pimp." Banister noted that a photograph existed "showing Lindbergh with this woman and her pimp." In addition, the SAC reported, Lindbergh had "tried to marry two different girls who were employed in a laundry." And, worse yet, the aviator reportedly still owed a debt of thirty-eight dollars to a Butte boardinghouse.<sup>42</sup>

Banister was also "reliably informed" that during Prohibition Lindbergh "should have been prosecuted on two different charges of bootlegging whiskey from Canada to Billings, Montana, by airplane." Despite the dated character of this information, Banister believed it could be useful. He wrote Hoover: "These charges, of course, are now outlawed by the Statute of Limitations, but I believe that it is still possible to obtain proof of the fact that he did bootleg whiskey." The U.S. Attorney in Billings, Banister believed, "will furnish it, properly supported by affidavits, etc., to [pro-Roosevelt newspaper and radio gossip columnist] Walter Winchell."<sup>43</sup>

Through another informant, FBI officials learned about the alleged state of Lindbergh's mental health. The data was gleaned from an informer who was associated with Lindbergh's close friend and colleague (they had coauthored a book together, *The Culture of Organs* [1938]), Dr. Alexis Carrel. The informer overheard part of a conversation between Carrel, who opposed Lindbergh's politics, and a psychologist over "the trend that Lindbergh's mind was taking." Carrel reportedly said that "Lindbergh hated the British and next to them he hated the United States." The informer was unable to report on the remainder of the conversation, but the information gathered was directed straight to Hoover via the "personal and confidential" system.<sup>44</sup>

42. Personal letter, W. G. Banister to J. Edgar Hoover, 3 June 1941, FBI 65-11449-71.

43. Ibid.

44. Personal and confidential letter, FBI Assistant Director Foxworth to J. Edgar Hoover,



Why did FBI agents collect and FBI officials maintain this type of information? Clearly, none of the reported information involved any alleged criminal activity on Lindbergh's part; even the bootlegging charge, if true, was not prosecutable due to the statute of limitations. The decision to collect and maintain this information had a deterrent purpose: to discredit Charles Lindbergh's character. Since his transatlantic flight in 1927, Lindbergh had developed a reputation as a shy, clean-cut, all-American boy. Such personally derogatory data could tarnish this image. And FBI officials' very interest in the information reflects their desire to provide the Roosevelt administration with information that could be used against not criminals but political opponents. Extant FBI records do not indicate whether Hoover shared this information with the White House. Given the meticulous system the FBI director had devised to distribute sensitive data, and given Roosevelt's long practice not to put anything controversial on paper, it remains possible that in fact Hoover had shared this information, but we may never know. In any event, that FBI officials sought it reveals much about their motives.

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While providing political intelligence to the White House during 1941, Hoover continued to offer—on a periodic and unsolicited basis—reports that increasingly focused upon the financial backing of the America First Committee. Even though Roosevelt did not follow up on Hoover's initial offer to investigate the committee's finances, Hoover nevertheless continued to pursue this avenue of investigation. On 10 July, as anti-interventionists rallied to oppose aid to Russia, Hoover informed the White House via special messenger that newspaper publishers Joseph Patterson and Robert McCormick—of the conservative *New York Daily News* and *Chicago Tribune* respectively—had contributed “a lot of money” to the America First Committee. Moreover, Patterson was said to have wanted his “large sums” contributions kept secret. Hoover added that the committee, then, proactively funded the anti-interventionist periodical *Uncensored*, a copy of which he provided the White House.<sup>45</sup>

Two months later, Hoover again offered the White House information relative to the America First Committee's financial sources “to supplement the previous information concerning this group . . . in accordance with his

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10 February 1942, FBI 65–11449–128.

45. Personal and confidential letter, Hoover to Watson, 10 July 1941, and blind memorandum, 10 May 1941, Official File 10-B, FDRL.



[Roosevelt's] request of February 21, 1941." Despite Hoover's characterization of the information as part of Roosevelt's previous request—which it was not—the White House accepted the information with no complaint and Hoover promised to keep the president "currently advised in matters of this kind." The particular financial information Hoover provided indicated that a large, unnamed Jewish organization operating through the Guggenheim Foundation had withdrawn its support of the America First Committee because of its "anti-Roosevelt" position, its efforts to embarrass the president, and its espousal of "anti-Jewish propaganda." FBI agents were never able to substantiate these allegations, yet they did jibe with popular notions about the character of the America First Committee that were not always accurate but successfully propagated by pro-Allied, interventionist groups. Further, this type of information also helped to sustain the biases about the group held by certain senior White House officials, not the least of whom was the president himself.<sup>46</sup>

In their ceaseless efforts to uncover the financial sources of America First, FBI agents pursued all possible leads. A new opportunity arose in October when an FBI informer provided information about America First's participation in Wisconsin's first congressional district. What caught the attention of FBI officials was a Wisconsin state law that required "all organizations participating in political campaigns to file a detailed expense account." The local America First chapter had allegedly violated this law, prompting Wisconsin State Attorney John Martin to order the local chapter to release its election records. The incident, moreover, gave hope to FBI officials that they would discover the financial sources behind America First. There is no mention in FBI records, however, as to the disposition of this particular effort other than a notation that the Wisconsin chapter "has refused to comply with this law as of the present writing." Nevertheless, the episode further illustrates the lengths to which Hoover would go to satisfy what he believed to be the political interests of the Roosevelt White House. It also suggests that FBI officials were seeking any information that might serve as the basis on which the bureau could build a legal case against America First based upon the Foreign Agents Registration Act. If it could have been proven that the America First Committee had received funds from a foreign group, the committee could have been prosecuted as an unregistered agent of a foreign power.<sup>47</sup>

46. Personal and confidential letter, Hoover to Watson, 22 September 1941, and blind memorandum, 22 September 1941, Official File 10-B, FDRL.

47. Memorandum, D. A. Flinn to Mr. Kramer, 13 October 1941, FBI 100-4712-203.

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Another investigative avenue FBI agents focused upon with regard to the America First Committee was its alleged links to subversive groups. If agents could verify such information it could have been employed to discredit America First or to prosecute its members as agents of a foreign power. Either way, FBI officials would have satisfied the political interests of the president. Ironically, though, the very act of Hoover's continually passing on to the White House unsubstantiated reports purporting that the America First Committee had questionable associations helped to sustain administration beliefs that the group was, indeed, subversive. With government officials holding such views, it is no wonder that the Great Debate of 1939–41 was such a bitter one.

In pursuing this line of investigation, FBI agents focused specifically on the America First chapters in Washington, D.C., Chicago, and New York City. These were the three largest chapters of the organization and generated for investigators a significant amount of political intelligence. The primary means by which agents gathered their information was through the use of informers. The reliance on informers is significant to the bureau's larger investigative effort because, in general, the reliability of the informers was questionable at best. But in FBI officials' quest to provide the White House with derogatory information on policy critics, accuracy was not a top priority. And, indeed, the quality of the FBI's information on the America First Committee was often suspect. Most often, except for the very first reports agents filed on the committee, FBI officials seemingly accepted the widely held notion that America First and other anti-interventionists were fascist dupes. Interventionist groups—notably the Fight for Freedom Committee—had successfully promoted this view and, clearly, the perception worked in favor of the FBI.

The bureau's informer in the Washington, D.C., area reflected the popular view of the committee as a subversive group. The unidentified informer claimed he had ascertained the validity of the AFC's questionable connections by listing bogus memberships with pro-Nazi and other subversive groups on his membership application. The AFC's reaction to his application, according to the informant, was merely a smile and a nod. From this, the informer concluded that the America First Committee was "deeply polluted by the Fascist crowd." In his view, the "honest isolationists" in the committee were vastly outnumbered by "anti-administration businessmen and industrialists with an overwhelming following of

appeasers, Nazis, Fascists, and other enemies of the democratic way of life.” More directly, he claimed America First was the nexus for a fascist revolution in America as numerous subversive groups and over 130 congressmen were either “openly or clandestinely with the America First movement.”<sup>48</sup>

Not all FBI sources reported that America First was fascist. The SAC in Chicago, for example, reported that after the dissolution of the committee, “investigation to date has failed to reveal any indication that the structure of America First, has in any way, been used by foreign interests or individuals cooperating with foreign interests.” The agent also argued that “a few local Chapters . . . have reportedly made available lists and pledged cooperation to certain radical groups but these have been isolated instances and in the opinion of persons interviewed, represented only a minute minority of the total membership.”<sup>49</sup>

The SAC of the FBI’s New York City office took a different view. He characterized the America First Committee as a Nazi tool. He summarized the totality of the information collected by the New York office as tending “to prove support of, or connection with the America First Committee by such known or alleged subversive organizations as the German-American Bund, Christian Front, Silver Shirts, Women United, Mothers’ organizations, Christian Mobilizers, American Destiny Party” among many other groups and extremist individuals. Not only did the America First Committee not maintain official links with any of these groups, none of the information in the SAC’s report—such as newspaper and magazine clippings from extremist publications—proved the existence of subversive connections. His reporting reflects only an interest in data that suggested subversive links, but it also shows a failure by FBI agents to investigate properly.<sup>50</sup>



In its official history, British Security Coordination claimed that it had investigated and taken direct action against the America First Committee. To reiterate, because no significant documentation has been released regarding the BSC’s activities or relationship with the FBI in either the United States or Britain, historians cannot confirm the scope or veracity of this claim. Nevertheless, we have the BSC’s official history and, if used

48. Report, SAC Washington, DC to FBI HQ, 26 May 1942, FBI 100–4712–384.

49. Report, SAC Chicago to FBI HQ, 29 May 1942, FBI 100–4712–397.

50. Report, SAC New York to FBI HQ, 11 July 1942, FBI 100–4712–443.

very carefully, we can at least ascertain a likely if incomplete indication of the BSC's activities.

What is most obviously reflected in the BSC history—which was written secretly in 1945—are contemporary perceptions of the America First Committee. While these perceptions are largely counterfactual, they do confirm a certain level of honesty in the history itself because these views were so widely held at the time. For example, the BSC history claims that the America First Committee had legitimate origins but, over time, had degenerated into “a pro-German association.” This view corresponds to how FBI officials viewed America First during the 1940s.<sup>51</sup> The BSC's assessment of America First also included the claim that the group “appealed to pacifists, haters of Roosevelt, haters of Great Britain anti-Communists, anti-Semites, admirers of Germany, American imperialists, devotees of big business, and those who hated Europe.” While the America First Committee indeed had some members who variously fit these criteria, it was not a pacifist organization and the group made serious efforts to exclude extreme elements from its ranks. Yet the BSC's opinion of the committee's makeup corresponds with contemporary interventionist opinion of America First.<sup>52</sup>

Other aspects about the America First Committee are inaccurate in the official BSC history but reflect contemporary assumptions about the organization. According to the BSC, America First had seven hundred chapters and nearly one million members. More recent scholarly research into the America First Committee reveals that the group had four hundred and fifty chapters and about eight hundred thousand members. The BSC history also claims that during 1941 Charles Lindbergh had emerged as the committee's leader. While Lindbergh certainly was the group's most popular and controversial speaker and member, he was not its leader. Nevertheless, such a view was widely believed in the 1940s. Other views of America First in the BSC history include a belief that the group had been infiltrated by German agents who turned the committee “more openly anti-British and pro-German.” As evidence, the history cites a speech Lindbergh had given just prior to the Pearl Harbor attack where he pointed

51. *British Security Coordination: The Secret History of British Intelligence in the Americas, 1940–45* (London: St. Ermin's Press, 1998), 71–72. For the FBI's view see report, SAC Washington, DC, to FBI HQ, 26 May 1942, FBI 100–4712–384.

52. *British Security Coordination*, 72. For the contemporary interventionist view of America First see circular-letter, Henry W. Hobson, 3 November 1941, Box 1, Fight for Freedom manuscripts, Seeley Mudd Library, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ. See also Cole, *America First: The Battle against Intervention*.

out three war-agitating groups: the British, the Jews, and the White House. These examples again illustrate contemporary viewpoints, many of which were also held by FBI officials, and we should not dismiss them so easily as lies and distortions perpetuated by official history.<sup>53</sup>

BSC head William Stephenson was said to have “perceived the potential menace of the America First Committee.” Given Stephenson’s and the BSC’s unsurprising views of the group, he had allegedly “dispatched [agents] to each part of the country to attend its meetings, to keep track of its new members and to ponder upon new and effective ways of instigating counter-propaganda.”<sup>54</sup> There is no documentary evidence currently available to confirm that BSC agents, like FBI agents, were used to monitor the America First Committee, but there is some reason to doubt it.

It is inconceivable that Hoover—a bureaucrat always very protective of his FBI’s turf and always concerned about unwelcome and dangerous public exposure—would permit a foreign intelligence agency to run freely about the country investigating and attempting to discredit American political groups. If the BSC’s activities had been discovered, it would have reflected badly upon the FBI and Hoover, showing him to be in league with the British and not in control of American security. Even the BSC history admits that FBI officials “were naturally inclined to resent any interference in their affairs by a foreign agency.” Moreover, by the early summer of 1942, according to the BSC’s own history, “all foreign intelligence agencies were prohibited, *inter alia*, from employing their own agents within the United States.”<sup>55</sup>

What seems far more likely is that Hoover shared the intelligence he gathered about America First with the BSC, and, subsequently, when writing their organizational history, BSC officials liberally employed the term “agent” when describing the work BSC personnel allegedly conducted. We know the FBI and the BSC maintained a very close relationship, that they exchanged intelligence, and that they were apparently interested in the very same targets; we just do not know the exact nature and scope of this intelligence sharing to date.

In terms of the BSC and its claimed “action” against the America First Committee, it employed (allegedly) three avenues of attack. First, the BSC would expose in the press America First’s “close ties with German activities.” Second, the BSC “approached” various interventionist groups to plan

53. *British Security Coordination*, 72–73; Doenecke, *The Battle against Intervention*, 9.

54. *British Security Coordination*, 73.

55. *Ibid.*, 351, xxxiii.

attacks, “through them,” on the America First Committee. And third, the BSC history claims with no clarity that “efforts were made”—by whom it does not say—“to prove that the society was concerned with illegal, treasonous activities.” All three avenues, reportedly, were successful.<sup>56</sup>

It is conceivable that the BSC may have had access to sympathetic newspapers or have liaised with them through a third party, but no direct evidence confirms this. It has been established, however, that at least one interventionist group indeed had access to British officials, but the extent of the BSC’s efforts to develop incriminating information against the AFC is unknown. The Fight for Freedom Committee sought and maintained a relationship with British officials. (The BSC history claims, unconvincingly, that Fight for Freedom was, in reality, a British front.) When the Fight for Freedom Committee was formed in 1940, one of its principal members—Dr. Henry Van Dusen, a theology professor at the Union Theological Seminary and graduate of Edinburgh University—sought liaison with the British embassy. With the assistance of Aubrey Morgan, a British Information Service official in New York City, Van Dusen contacted British Ambassador Lord Lothian. Van Dusen and Lothian agreed that Fight for Freedom would work with the assistance of the British embassy.<sup>57</sup>

Historian Mark Lincoln Chadwin has found that the Fight for Freedom Committee acted as a liaison between the British embassy, British Information Service, and the American interventionist press. Van Dusen’s close cooperation with the British embassy, in helping it to distribute British propaganda to the press, was a violation of the Foreign Agents Registration Act. Fight for Freedom, by the letter of the law, had acted as an agent of a foreign power. This is not insignificant because Laura Ingalls, as will be shown, was successfully prosecuted under this law for accepting money and propaganda from the German embassy. It was unlikely, however, that Fight for Freedom officials would have been prosecuted as their interests were in line with the administration’s foreign policy goals.<sup>58</sup>

Since Fight for Freedom served as a liaison between the British Information Service and the interventionist press, it is possible that the BSC played some indirect role. The British Information Service was headquartered, like the BSC, in Rockefeller Center, strongly suggesting that the two organizations had ties. It is at least conceivable that the BSC cooperated

56. *British Security Coordination*, 73.

57. Mark Lincoln Chadwin, *The Hawks of World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 41–42.

58. Chadwin, *The Hawks of World War II*, 74, 100, 102, 138–39, 143.

with the information service to forward pro-Allied information to the interventionist press and then took too much of the credit in its official history.

In one incident, the BSC history claims that BSC agents persuaded Fight for Freedom to attend a speech Senator Gerald Nye delivered in Boston in September 1941 where the group distributed leaflets accusing him of being a Nazi appeaser. The BSC also credited itself for having Fight for Freedom buy advertising space in a Boston newspaper also labeling Nye a Nazi appeaser, as well as persuading local radio stations to deny the senator airtime. The BSC prompted Fight for Freedom, according to the BSC history, to target Congressman Fish. Fish had delivered a speech in Milwaukee and during his concluding remarks somebody handed him a note stating: "Der Fuehrer thanks you for your loyalty." Newspaper photographers reportedly captured the scene and then published it. These examples, according to the BSC history, were representative of the BSC's "more direct action" against the America First Committee and its speakers.<sup>59</sup>

The BSC history recounts one failed attempt at "direct action," however. At a 30 October 1941 America First rally at Madison Square Garden, BSC agents allegedly targeted speaker Charles Lindbergh. BSC agents supposedly created duplicate tickets to fill the America First crowd with interventionists, particularly Fight for Freedom members. Some interventionists were to arrive early and others later to disrupt the seating of legitimate America First ticket holders. Unfortunately for the BSC, attendance at the rally was low and the illegitimate attendees were seated in vacant seats, thereby increasing the rally's already low attendance. Historian Michele Flynn Stenehjem has discovered that John T. Flynn of the New York America First chapter directed that the tickets for the rally be specially stamped. By stamping the tickets prior to their distribution, according to Stenehjem, illegitimate ticket holders were ushered to an out-of-way section of Madison Square Garden.<sup>60</sup>

There is no verifiable evidence to prove that the BSC had persuaded or directed Fight for Freedom (or other interventionist groups) to disrupt America First Committee rallies. It is possible that the BSC sought to influence this type of behavior, but it is equally if not more likely that these groups employed disruptive tactics without any prompting from external forces. In his book *Desperate Deception: British Covert Operations in the*

59. *British Security Coordination*, 74.

60. *Ibid.*, 74–75; Michele Flynn Stenehjem, *An American First: John T. Flynn and the America First Committee* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1976), 163–64.

*United States, 1939–44* (1998), Thomas Mahl claims that the Fight for Freedom Committee was, in fact, a front for the BSC. Mahl provides no verifiable evidence beyond speculation to support his contentions and too easily accepts the official BSC line, reflecting the long persistence of the mythology surrounding the activities of British intelligence in America. Fight for Freedom indeed had contacts with British representatives, but it does not follow that they were a front organization. Until verifiable documentation is available, all that can be concluded is that the BSC played a role—the scope as yet undefined—in attempting to disrupt the America First Committee.<sup>61</sup>

61. See Thomas E. Mahl, *Desperate Deception: British Covert Operations in the United States, 1939–44* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 1998).



## Focus

### From Great Debate Stalemate to Wartime Probe

*Mid-1941 to Summer 1942*

Despite the interventionists having won the battle over lend-lease, the Great Debate was in no way settled. Between the summer and late autumn of 1941, the two factions found themselves deadlocked over further revision of the Neutrality Act, whether to arm American merchant ships. In this heated climate, FBI officials increasingly focused upon anti-interventionists in Congress—such as Senators Burton Wheeler, Gerald Nye, and David Walsh and Congressman Hamilton Fish—and they stepped up their efforts to unearth derogatory data on the America First Committee and others that might be used either to prosecute or discredit them. These efforts extended into 1942 and, in some cases, with the country at war, intensified.

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By early 1941 Senator Wheeler again surfaced in connection with the franking issue, but this time with far-reaching political implications. The seriousness of the affair revolved around the fact that the German government had, in fact, initiated a propaganda scheme—albeit ineffectual—in the United States, utilizing the congressional frank, in an attempt to increase anti-interventionist sentiment. While the FBI did not have jurisdiction in matters involving the frank (it was an issue for the post office inspectors), FBI agents nevertheless collected information and forwarded it to the Justice Department. The FBI's interest began with Wheeler, shifted to Senator Nye, and, more important, came to focus upon Congressman Hamilton Fish.

While the franking issue had begun in 1940 with Senator Wheeler—who was an aggressive anti-interventionist legislator—it only became a

national issue during 1941. In February of that year, the senator decided to discover who had misused his frank, which, inevitably, led him to FBI Director Hoover. Wheeler told Hoover that he had discovered the abuse after the post office returned a misaddressed franked letter to his Senate office. The letter originated from an organization calling itself American Defenders. The senator told Hoover that he was “extremely anxious to ascertain whether someone is using my franked envelopes illegally, and whether someone is using my name in this connection.”<sup>1</sup>

Hoover forwarded Wheeler’s complaint to Lawrence Smith, an official in the Justice Department’s Neutrality Laws Unit. Smith reiterated the FBI’s lack of jurisdiction even if, he noted, the senator’s envelopes had been stolen from his office. If that had happened, Smith said, the affair would then be a matter for the Washington metropolitan police. Hoover forwarded these details to Wheeler with no follow-up investigation. Nevertheless, in subsequent weeks the senator’s name again surfaced in terms of the franking issue.<sup>2</sup>

According to the FBI’s special agent in charge in El Paso, a local resident allegedly had received from Wheeler a large package containing unaddressed, franked envelopes. The SAC reported that each envelope contained a printed speech and letter signed by Wheeler that denounced the lend-lease bill while suggesting Roosevelt was seeking dictatorial powers. When reporting this event to the FBI, the Texas resident demanded an investigation because, in his view, the literature from Wheeler was “un-American.” Despite being told the FBI had no jurisdiction, the Texan threatened to write Senator Carol Hatch (Democrat from New Mexico), who was a member of the judiciary committee. With Hatch’s name invoked, Hoover reported the event to the Justice Department. What happened next is unclear, but, again, Senator Wheeler was associated with questionable activity in official FBI reports that, in sum, reaffirmed negative administration views about him.<sup>3</sup>

By the late spring and early summer, as issues over convoys and aid to Russia were hotly debated, the franking issue evolved from an isolated

1. Letter, Wheeler to Hoover, 4 February 1941, FBI 62-55261-6; letter, The German Friend Society of Houston to Senator Burton K. Wheeler, 20 January 1941, FBI 62-55261-6.

2. Memorandum, Matthew F. McGuire, the assistant to the attorney general, to L. M. C. Smith, Neutrality Laws Unit, 17 February 1941, FBI 62-55261-9X; letter, Hoover to Burton K. Wheeler, 10 February 1941, FBI 62-55261-6; letter, Hoover to Burton K. Wheeler, 6 March 1941, FBI 62-55261-9X; letter, Hoover to SAC Houston, 6 March 1941, FBI 62-55261-11.

3. Letter, SAC El Paso to Hoover, 20 March 1941, FBI 62-55261-12; memorandum, Hoover to McGuire, 27 March 1941, FBI 62-55261-12.

event to a sensational national issue. This developed after a direct-mail advertiser named Henry Hoke wrote Wheeler accusing him of misusing his frank. Hoke charged the senator with “aiding the Nazi plan by allowing the use of [the] franking privilege for the dissemination of disruptive propaganda.” Wheeler responded with a denial that he had done anything wrong and questioned why Hoke had ignored the interventionists’ similar use of the frank.<sup>4</sup>

Hoke rebutted Wheeler’s comments in a second letter, and then published a public condemnation of the senator and his alleged abuses in a July article titled “War in the Mails.” When the interventionist Fight for Freedom Committee learned of Hoke’s charges, they also attacked Wheeler while asking the postmaster general to limit Congress’s franking privilege.<sup>5</sup>

The sensational nature of the now public charge against Wheeler prompted reporter Blair Moody, of the *Detroit News*, to telephone FBI headquarters to ascertain whether the FBI had investigated the charge. Concerned with the public nature of the charge, especially since the bureau had no jurisdiction, FBI Associate Director Clyde Tolson reported to Hoover “that I could very definitely tell him that no such investigation is being made by this Bureau.” Technically, Tolson’s claim was accurate inasmuch as the FBI was collecting information about the franking issue while not officially investigating it.<sup>6</sup>

The event became more acrimonious when, on 24 July, Secretary of War Henry Stimson learned that several active-duty soldiers had received postcards from Senator Wheeler urging them to write the president demanding he avoid war. The revelation came as the Senate debated whether to extend draftees’ military service. After consulting Roosevelt, Stimson then publicly announced that Wheeler had come “very near the line of subversive activities against the United States, if not treason.” Wheeler replied that he had made no attempt to influence the soldiers and explained that

4. The FBI obtained copies of the Wheeler/Hoke correspondence from an unsolicited source in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The FBI has withheld this person’s name under provisions of the FOIA. Letter, [deleted] to Hoover, 28 July 1941, FBI 62–55261–26; letter, Wheeler to A. H. Becker, 7 July 1941, FBI 62–55261–26; letter, Henry Hoke to Wheeler, 16 July 1941, FBI 62–55261–26.

5. Henry Hoke news release, 24 July 1941; Henry Hoke, “War in the Mails: An Explanation of the Most Gigantic Direct Mail Fraud in the History of Advertising”; all in FBI 62–55261–26; Mark Lincoln Chadwin, *The Hawks of World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 213.

6. Memorandum, Assistant Director Clyde Tolson to Hoover, 10 June 1941, FBI 62–55261–21.

only three postcards, out of over one million that had been mailed through a commercial list, were mistakenly sent to the soldiers. Upon realizing his error, Stimson—ever the gentleman—publicly apologized to Wheeler but the controversy did not end.<sup>7</sup>

In late July 1941, for example, after Wheeler's alleged part in the franking controversy had been revealed, the Women's Roosevelt Democratic Club of Los Angeles wrote Hoover accusing the senator of having taken a \$100,000 bribe when he worked as a U.S. District Attorney in Montana after the First World War. Resurrecting the charges drummed up against him amid the acrimony of the 1920s Teapot Dome scandal, the group claimed that Wheeler had accepted the bribe in return for dismissing a white slave trafficking charge. Not content in sharing their information only with the FBI, the women's group also sent a telegram to the attorney general demanding a prosecution of Wheeler because his "propaganda to our soldiers foment a dangerous and improper attitude in our armed forces, imperiling morale." Irrespective of the dated charge, and the fact that the matter had been resolved two decades before, Hoover forwarded the women's complaint to the Justice Department for direction. In response, Assistant to the Attorney General Matthew McGuire wrote: "In view of the fact that the [bribery] charge would be barred by the Statute of Limitations, no investigation of the matter should be undertaken."<sup>8</sup>

The focus on Wheeler might have ended, but the franking-abuse issue shifted to Senator Gerald Nye and Congressman Hamilton Fish. During October, amid debate on neutrality revision, FBI agents received information from two informants concerning Senator Nye and the congressional frank. The first informant—political operative Henry Grunewald—reported Senator Nye's belief that the misuse of the frank was "widespread" and "perfectly regular." Grunewald also reported Nye's perception that Roosevelt had a "determination . . . to get into war." Due to the sensitivity of Grunewald as a source, FBI Assistant Director Edward Tamm concluded that "this info should not be transmitted outside [of the] Bureau," confirming indirectly that FBI officials sought and disseminated political

7. Stimson as quoted in Wayne S. Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists, 1932–45* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 470–71.

8. Letter, Emily Denison, President Women's Roosevelt Democratic Club to Hoover, 28 July 1941, FBI 62–55261–25; telegram, Women's Roosevelt Democratic Club to attorney general, 25 July 1941, FBI 62–55261–25; letter, Hoover to Denison, 2 August 1941, FBI 62–55261–25; memorandum, Hoover to Assistant to the Attorney General Matthew F. McGuire, 2 August 1941, FBI 62–55261–25; memorandum, McGuire to Hoover, 11 August 1941, FBI 62–55261–28.

intelligence. (If released, the specific nature of the comment probably could have been traced back to Grunewald and then to the FBI.) Instead, FBI officials filed it in Hoover's secret office file using the Do Not File procedure.<sup>9</sup> The second unidentified informant claimed Nye regularly sent a great deal of franked mail to people outside of his state. In light of the developing franking-abuse story, Hoover forwarded *this* information to the Justice Department.<sup>10</sup>

Time and again, interventionists accused certain congressmen of misusing their franking privilege. Such charges were strongly denied by the accused, but German propagandists were, in fact, behind the brouhaha. On 29 July 1941, the German chargé d'affaires in Washington reported to the German Foreign Ministry that:

In recent months the mass dispatch of postcards has proved to be particularly effective as a propaganda action which can be carried out very quickly and suddenly and which is to be directed at as large a group of persons as possible who do not have much intellectual training. Therefore through the agency of the [Embassy] press officer the mailing of about a dozen cards, each in 100,000—in words a hundred thousand—to a million copies has been organized and financed. They contained sarcastic attacks on Roosevelt and the warmongering members of his Cabinet, reminders of his campaign promise to keep America out of war, a reference to the American blood sacrifices in the World War, an appeal to American mothers, and they asked recipients to write or telegraph in this sense to their representatives in Congress and the White House. As all of the postcards had the letterhead of the American Congress or of the members of Congress concerned and contained mainly material which was taken from purely American sources and also appeared in one form or other in the official "*Congressional Record*," our hand was not in any way recognizable. Alarmed by the success of this campaign of postcards, the interventionist press is already starting to attack their being sent through Congress, but so far without success.<sup>11</sup>

9. Do Not File memorandum, Helen Gandy to Hoover, 8 October 1941, Official and Confidential Files of J. Edgar Hoover (hereafter Hoover O&C), Folder 80, Henry Grunewald, FBI HQ, Washington, DC.

10. Memorandum, Hoover to attorney general, 13 October 1941, FBI 100-4712-207.

11. Telegram, chargé d'affaires German Embassy Washington to German Foreign Ministry, 29 July 1941, in *Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945*, series D, vol. 13 (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1964), 234.

The chargé d'affaires further reported that Senator Wheeler had been targeted and, he claimed, the public difficulties between Wheeler and Stimson reflected the successful cultivation of infighting.<sup>12</sup>

Leading the German black propaganda<sup>13</sup> operation was George Sylvester Viereck, who was born in Germany but naturalized as an American citizen in 1901. Nevertheless, he retained strong Teutonic sympathies. During the First World War, for example, he distributed pro-German propaganda in the United States, and with the advent of the Second World War he registered himself with the State Department as a paid agent of the German government. Viereck then received financial support for his activities from the German Library of Information—the German government's propaganda agency—and he edited this organization's periodical, *Facts in Review*.<sup>14</sup> Moving from New York City to Washington in early 1940, Viereck took a job writing speeches for the anti-interventionist Senator Ernest Lundeen. After the senator died in an untimely plane crash later that year, Viereck found a job in the office of New York Representative Hamilton Fish. It was from this position that he was able to manipulate the congressional frank.<sup>15</sup>

Approaching George Hill—a forty-five-year-old clerk in Fish's office—Viereck asked to use Fish's frank to distribute one of Lundeen's speeches because the deceased senator's staff was unable to cope with voluminous reprints. It was from this initial recruitment of Hill that Viereck began to manipulate Fish's office to effect a wide distribution—more so than any lone senator or congressman would have done—of anti-interventionist literature. To keep the operation secret, Viereck used a third party (an anti-interventionist publicist named Prescott Dennett) to maintain contact with Hill.<sup>16</sup>

Viereck gathered anti-interventionist literature and forwarded it to Dennett's office wherein he sent it to George Hill. Hill then had Fish insert the material into the *Congressional Record* whereby Hill would order thousands of reprints and then send these back to Dennett in franked envelopes. Dennett was then able to mail the literature out to whomever he wished, and among the organizations that unwittingly helped to distribute Viereck's propaganda was the America First Committee.<sup>17</sup>

12. Ibid., 234n2.

13. Black propaganda purports to be from one source but is, in reality, from another. In this instance, the Germans attempted to use the Senate to cover their own efforts.

14. Michael Sayers and Albert E. Kahn, *Sabotage! The Secret War against America* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1942), 168–73.

15. Ibid., 181–84.

16. Ibid., 186–87.

17. Ibid., 187–88; Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists*, 472; "Mail Bags Linked to No-

While the German propaganda effort was certainly creative, its efficacy was negligible. All Viereck managed to accomplish was a wider distribution of anti-interventionist literature that, in any event, did not lead Americans to reassess their view of the Allies. Besides, since late 1940 the America First Committee had already been conducting a much larger and well-organized effort to prevent American intervention in the European war. The revelation of a link between German propagandists (not spies) and leading anti-interventionists, no matter if the anti-interventionists were unsuspecting, was a boon to interventionist partisans like the Fight for Freedom Committee. Such groups used the event to discredit the anti-interventionists by accusing them of being Nazi dupes, and thereby confirmed to some their status as subversives.

In September 1941, a federal grand jury led by prosecutor William Maloney began to consider evidence of German propaganda and "other subversive elements" in the United States. Simultaneously, *Washington Post* reporter Dillard Stokes took up the franking matter. He revealed the link between Dennett's and Fish's offices as well as the fact that America First was tangentially involved. The increased publicity led the police to seize franked mail from America First's Washington chapter on 25 September. Thereafter, the propaganda machine created by Viereck was exposed publicly.<sup>18</sup>

Both George Hill and George Viereck were called to testify before the grand jury, where Hill perjured himself when answering a question about his connection to Viereck. In early 1942, Hill was successfully prosecuted for perjury and received a jail sentence of between two and six years. Viereck was convicted for violating the Foreign Agents Registration Act inasmuch as he failed to reveal the full extent of his activities to the government. When asked, Congressman Fish refused to testify before the grand jury, leading the prosecutor to subpoena him. Fish's hesitancy proved to be a further boon to the interventionists who publicly questioned why the congressman refused to cooperate, alluding in their remarks that he must have something to hide. But when he finally did testify, Fish revealed nothing significant except his ignorance of what was going on in his congressional office. At one point, however, his behavior made for good headlines when he shouted at the prosecutor for suggesting his views were similar to

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War Groups Are Investigated," *New York Times*, 27 September 1941.

18. Memorandum, Assistant Attorney General Wendell Berge to Hoover, 26 May 1942, FOIAed document, Justice Department in Wayne S. Cole Papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library (hereafter HHL), West Branch, IA; Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists*, 471–72; Chadwin, *The Hawks of World War II*, 214–15.

those of Viereck's. While the FBI had no jurisdiction, it did closely monitor the grand jury investigation. The Justice Department, moreover, requested that Hoover provide prosecutor Maloney information about Hamilton Fish.<sup>19</sup>

While one might assume—given Hoover's catering to Roosevelt's political interests—that he would have happily assisted Maloney, the FBI director did not. The facts are not entirely clear, but Hoover had personal differences with Maloney that originated from a critical comment the prosecutor had made about Hoover not taking a more proactive role in the case. (Given his providing of political intelligence to Roosevelt, Hoover would never have involved himself publicly in such a case.) The FBI director resented Maloney's criticism, which newsmen Drew Pearson and George Allen repeated in a nationwide broadcast, and it was this that led him to refuse helping the prosecutor even after Maloney tried to repair the damage. Hoover's only reply was to "make certain that we do everything proper to thoroughly handle all aspects of this case so as not to give this whelp any real basis for howling."<sup>20</sup>

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William Stephenson and the BSC were also interested in the congressional franking controversy. The only accessible source of information, however, about the BSC's possible involvement is its official history. Since none of the book's information can be confirmed it must be used with care. Nevertheless, it is possible that the BSC was involved, but it must be kept in mind that the official history purposefully—and for bureaucratic reasons—painted a flattering picture of the BSC's activities. Whether and how the FBI liaised with the BSC is not touched upon, but given the FBI and the BSC's relationship they might have communicated with one another over the matter.

19. Summary memorandum re Representative Hamilton Fish, 26 September 1942, FBI 65–29514–33, pp. 14, 17–20; memorandum, Assistant Attorney General Wendell Berge to Hoover, 6 June 1942, FBI 65–29514–22; Chadwin, *The Hawks of World War II*, 215. Unfortunately the FBI has withheld large portions of the summary memorandum regarding Fish as well as a memorandum sent to the White House regarding Fish on FOIA privacy grounds, resulting in an incomplete understanding of their interest. "Fish Aid Indicted as Perjurer; Franked Mail Involved in Counts," *New York Times*, 25 October 1941; "Hill Gets Prison on Perjury Charge," *New York Times*, 7 February 1942, 19; "Fish Shouts 'Lie' at Viereck Trial," *New York Times*, 21 February 1942, 7.

20. Do Not File memorandum, Helen Gandy to Hoover, 28 October 1941, Hoover O&C; memorandum, Gandy to Hoover, 28 October 1941, Hoover O&C.



According to the BSC official history, an “American friend” of British intelligence had revealed the franking abuse involving Senators Wheeler and Nye and Congressman Fish. The BSC does not name this “American friend,” but the relevant paragraph leaves no doubt that the person alluded to was Henry Hoke:

For this campaign [revealing the congressional franking abuse], the cooperation of an American friend was enlisted. He worked on his own, in his own time and with his own money, while BSC provided him with information, guidance and extra funds. By profession he was a “direct mail advertising specialist.” His clients consisted of those commercial companies who wished to be told about new and better methods of advertising by mail.<sup>21</sup>

The BSC version of the franking controversy has it that after Hoke developed the franking information, BSC agents more thoroughly probed the issue. The agents supposedly had learned that a particular type of letter-addressing machine was used and they discovered mailing lists originating from the German Library of Information. The BSC history further claims that it was BSC agents who had uncovered George Hill and George Sylvester Viereck as the individuals heading the propaganda campaign. Whether BSC agents actually had played a leading role in this episode remains unknown, but even if they had it appears that BSC efforts were minimal. Hoke, indeed, had investigated and pushed the issue—particularly with Senator Wheeler—and even the BSC history freely admits that Hoke had worked “on his own” though with, perhaps, limited BSC assistance. Moreover, after Hoke had publicized the franking controversy, the federal grand jury had convened and *Washington Post* reporter Stokes began to write his exposés. Then, after this, the Fight for Freedom Committee began to take up and press the issue.

Everything about the franking controversy the BSC history claims as its own, moreover, can be found in the work of Hoke, the grand jury, and Stokes. This suggests that the BSC history has exaggerated its role. Yet such an exaggeration should not be considered unusual given that the BSC history as a whole, indeed, paints a rosy and sometimes misleading portrait of its own work in America, which was more for bureaucratic reasons—to justify its existence—rather than to preserve truth.

21. *British Security Coordination*, 75. The BSC history also notes that the “American friend” wrote an open letter to Wheeler about the frank, which Hoke had done.

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In October 1941, as the British were losing increasing numbers of ships in the intensifying war in the Atlantic, President Roosevelt asked Congress to revise the Neutrality Act to allow both the arming of American merchant ships and to permit those ships to dock at British ports. The president's goal was to increase the ability of the United States to provide Britain with aid-short-of-war. Anti-interventionists, as historian Wayne Cole has noted, decided at this point that they could not defeat the president in a political battle where the issue was defined in terms of aid-short-of-war. Instead, they attempted to present it as one of war or peace. The America First Committee urged the public, and members of the House and Senate, to regard revision as a move that, if passed, would result in war and, if rejected, in peace. While the effort failed, the victory over the anti-interventionists was razor thin and, in part, confirmed the continuing influence of the America First Committee in shaping public opinion.

The Senate voted for revision by a margin of 50 to 37, and the House by a vote of 212 to 194. Still, the debate over intervention was far from settled. As Roosevelt's speech writer Robert Sherwood (and later chief of the Office of War Information) wrote concerning these times, "[I]solationist sentiment became ever more strident in expression and aggressive in action, and Roosevelt was relatively powerless to combat it. He said everything 'short of war' that could be said. He had no more tricks left. The hat from which he had pulled so many rabbits was empty."<sup>22</sup>

But President Roosevelt had, in fact, one last rabbit in his hat. To end the stalemate reflected in the Neutrality Act debate, Roosevelt opted for a companion strategy. On 17 November—the same day he signed the revised Neutrality Bill—the president directed his attorney general to begin "a Grand Jury investigation of the money sources behind the America First Committee." Roosevelt hoped that the convening of a grand jury, with its resultant publicity, might serve to discredit his anti-interventionist critics. He opted for this strategy out of his frustration to "get any action out of Congress." It is important to reiterate, however, that throughout 1941, FBI Director Hoover had forwarded to the president unsubstantiated reports suggesting that America First had questionable sources of funding. Many interventionists—both in and out of Congress—believed that the America First Committee's funds had originated from fascist sources, but in reality

22. Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists*, 446–53; Robert Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins: An Intimate History* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1948), 382–83.

the committee took careful steps to avoid taking any questionable funding. America First officials, for example, refused to accept donations over one hundred dollars unless the source had been vetted, and they refused, once, to accept a \$4,000 anonymous donation until the contributor's identity was verified.<sup>23</sup>

Hoover immediately sought to support Roosevelt's proposed grand jury inquiry. He first forwarded to Attorney General Biddle a summary memorandum of all information the FBI had concerning the America First Committee.<sup>24</sup> FBI agents also pursued a new lead. This lead originated in a sensationalist book in press at Harper and Brothers Publishers that claimed the German government had secretly subsidized the committee.<sup>25</sup> The book—originally—was to have focused only on America First, but after Pearl Harbor it examined the broader topic of fifth column activity. The book was Michael Sayers and Albert E. Kahn's *Sabotage! The Secret War against America* (1942).<sup>26</sup>

In their book, Sayers and Kahn recount the activities of several individuals supposedly associated with the America First Committee who had received money from German sources. The authors specifically describe how Frank Burch, a prominent Ohio lawyer and, according to the authors, founding member of the Akron chapter of America First, received \$10,000 from the German government to distribute pro-Nazi literature. Sayers and Kahn also suggest that Nazi Germany had funded the extremist paper the *Herald*, which often advertised for the America First Committee.<sup>27</sup>

23. Memorandum, Roosevelt to the attorney general, 17 November 1941, President's Secretary's File: Justice Department, FDRL; Cole, *America First*, 117, 126.

24. Memorandum, Tamm to Ladd, 21 November 1941, FBI 100-4712-230; memorandum, Hoover to the attorney general, 22 November 1941, FBI 100-4712-210; memorandum, Ladd to Hoover, 4 December 1941, FBI 100-4712-309; memorandum for attorney general re America First Committee, 4 December 1941, FBI 100-4712-309.

25. Memorandum, Tamm to Hoover, 21 November 1941, FBI 100-4712-231.

26. Sayers and Kahn, *Sabotage! The Secret War against America*. FOIA redactions do not reveal the authors' names, but other evidence proves that this was the book that had interested bureau officials. The names of the authors are deleted in FBI documents, but they do reveal that the authors' information about the sources of America First's funds was located at the offices of the *Hour*, a confidential newsletter that devoted itself to exposing Fifth Column activities. Albert Kahn, one of the book's authors, was the editor of this newsletter. Despite the redacted nature of the documents acquired by my own FOIA request, these names were publicly released in some of these identical documents released to historian Wayne Cole. Letter, SAC New York to Hoover, 25 April 1942, FBI 100-4712-344; letter, Foxworth to Hoover, 2 May 1942, FBI 100-4712-345; memorandum, Tamm to Hoover, 21 November 1941, FBI 100-4712-231. For Cole's copies of these documents refer to his papers at the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library in West Branch, IA.

27. Sayers and Kahn, *Sabotage!* 235-36. Historian Wayne Cole noted that Burch was

For several months FBI agents attempted to interview Sayers and Kahn's editor—Russell Davenport—to win permission to examine their research file. FBI agents tried time and again to arrange this interview but were plagued by continued scheduling conflicts and delays until Hoover personally stepped in and arranged to meet with Davenport. Hoover believed that Sayers and Khan's research file would be valuable for two reasons: "first, for informative purposes on the broad picture of subversive activities, and second, from the prosecutive angle." Bureau and Justice Department officials, meanwhile, evaluated the evidence available to them concerning this avenue of investigation. Eventually, though, Attorney General Biddle met with Harper and Brothers lawyer, Morris Ernst. Ernst, who maintained close ties to the Roosevelt administration and the president, relayed to Hoover that Sayers and Khan's evidence about America First having received foreign money was thin, but, he stressed, "there is a good deal of evidence of interlocking management which might be the basis of registering under the [Foreign Agents] Registration Act." Ernst emphasized that if investigators could prove America First had received any foreign money, the organization could be prosecuted for failing to register under the provisions of the law.<sup>28</sup>

Morris Ernst had a professional interest in discrediting the America First Committee. He revealed some of his thoughts months after the initiation of the Sayers and Kahn lead, but still within the time frame that FBI officials were considering developing information for prosecution. On 8 April 1942, Ernst wrote President Roosevelt advising him of a discussion he had with Attorney General Biddle suggesting "aggressive action against American Fifth Columnists through the medium of Treasury Department tax returns of information from America First, Coughlin, et al." Then on 23 May, Ernst sent the president an extensive list of people who had

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never an officer in the Akron chapter and that he did not contribute any money to the organization. See Cole, *America First*, 124; memorandum, Hoover to Biddle, 23 December 1941, FBI 100-4712-263.

28. Memorandum, Tamm to Ladd, 21 November 1941, FBI 100-4712-230; memorandum, Hoover to Tolson and Tamm, 27 November 1941, FBI 100-4712-232; memorandum, Hoover to Tolson and Tamm, 21 November 1941, FBI 100-4712-220; memorandum, Hoover to attorney general, 22 November 1941, FBI 100-4712-221; memorandum, Hoover to Tolson and Tamm, 24 November 1941, FBI 100-4712-228; memorandum, Hoover to Tolson and Tamm, 24 November 1941, FBI 100-4712-216; memorandum, Hoover to Tolson and Tamm, 22 November 1941, FBI 100-4712-217; memorandum, Hoover to Tolson and Tamm, 21 November 1941, FBI 100-4712-219. Many of these documents I obtained via the FOIA contain redactions. To see unredacted copies consult the Wayne S. Cole research file at the Hoover Presidential Library.

contributed money to the America First Committee that he had secured from “reliable” sources. When Ernst later learned that no one from either the Justice or Treasury Departments was seriously pursuing the matter (by 1942), he urged Roosevelt to continue the project. Despite Ernst’s suggestions for “aggressive action,” all along FBI officials were reluctant to undertake his plan owing to its public nature.<sup>29</sup>

Even before Ernst voiced his concerns to Roosevelt, Assistant FBI Director Tamm recommended on 12 December 1941 that the FBI avoid becoming involved in Ernst’s plan because it “obviously . . . [is] an effort to curtail exposed and publicized facts relating to organizations such as America First—in fact that is probably the organization that was specifically in his mind.” Nothing ever came of Ernst’s suggestions, but they illustrate the latent desire of some administration allies to discredit their opponents in the then heated political atmosphere. His suggestions also reveal the hesitancy of senior FBI officials to become involved in any action that would publicly be viewed as questionable and, moreover, linked to the FBI. Hoover preferred to work behind the scenes and in secret.<sup>30</sup>

Bureau officials nevertheless were keenly interested in the intelligence offered in the soon-to-be-published book. After some hesitation, and still having failed to obtain interviews with the book’s authors or the president of the publishing company, Justice Department officials decided to assign the case to the Criminal Division.<sup>31</sup> But the effort was too little, too late. Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December, the Justice Department temporarily suspended the case.<sup>32</sup> The bureau’s investigation resumed with the start of the new year, but FBI agents were not able to examine Sayers and Kahn’s material until April 1942. By then the anti-interventionists had disbanded and FBI officials had developed serious questions about the reliability of both Albert Kahn—owing to his alleged connections with the Communist party—and the Anti-Defamation League, which had offered the use of its files in this matter, because it was

29. Letter, Morris Ernst to Roosevelt, 8 April 1942, President’s Secretary’s File—Ernst, FDRL; letter, Ernst to Roosevelt, 23 May 1942, PSF—Ernst, FDRL; letter, Ernst to Roosevelt, 10 June 1942, PSF—Ernst, FDRL; memorandum, Edward A. Tamm to Hoover, 12 December 1941, Martin Dies Folder, Hoover O&C.

30. Ibid.

31. Memorandum, Hoover to Assistant Attorney General Berge, 2 December 1941, FBI 100–4712–240; memorandum, Tamm to Hoover, 2 December 1941, FBI 100–4712–243; memorandum, Tamm to Hoover, 2 December 1941, FBI 100–4712–244; memorandum, Tamm to Ladd, 4 December 1941, FBI 100–4712–245.

32. Memorandum, Lawrence M. C. Smith, Chief, Special Defense Unit, to Hoover, 23 December 1941, FBI 100–4712–264.

a leftist group. In any event, bureau officials eventually deemed their long-sought-after information “to be largely worthless.”<sup>33</sup>

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The FBI’s monitoring of the anti-interventionists did not cease with the United States’ entrance into the war. Despite the questionable nature of the assertions made by Sayers and Kahn, and the dissolution of the America First Committee, FBI officials remained focused on the committee because of its 1 December 1941 announcement about taking part in the 1942 congressional elections. Their plan was to campaign in an attempt to swing contested elections away from the president. Indeed, on 13 February 1942 Hoover informed Presidential Secretary Edwin Watson about a 17 December 1941 dinner party at which Charles Lindbergh was present. In addition to describing Lindbergh’s remarks at the meeting (which were obtained through an illegal wiretap [see chapter 6]), Hoover advised the White House that Lindbergh had “indicated . . . [that] the America First Committee can again be a political force; that there may be a time soon when the Committee can advocate a negotiated peace.” Hoover also provided Watson with a twenty-one-page summary memorandum on the “structure, activities, and connections of the America First Committee as it was organized prior to its allegedly going out of existence following our entry into war.”<sup>34</sup>

FBI agents then learned from an informer about the alleged post-Pearl Harbor secret activities of the America First Committee. On 26 February, FBI Associate Director Clyde Tolson reported to Hoover that, while at a (different) dinner party in New York, Lindbergh had allegedly remarked that the America First Committee had gone underground. The FBI’s source claimed that Lindbergh believed that “this war hysteria will wear off and we will come back.” In response to this development, Hoover advised Tolson “to get to [the] bottom of this.”<sup>35</sup>

Then, on 16 March, Hoover ordered senior FBI officials and SACs nationwide to continue to investigate the committee and to report within

33. Letter, Foxworth to Hoover, 2 May 1942, FBI 100–4712–345; letter, SAC New York to Hoover, 14 May 1942, FBI 100–4712–342; memorandum, Frank W. Crocker to Hoover, 1 May 1942, FBI 100–4712–343; letter, P. E. Foxworth to Hoover, 2 May 1942, FBI 100–4712–345.

34. Personal and confidential letter, Hoover to Watson, 13 February 1942, Official File 10-B, FDRL.

35. Memorandum, Clyde Tolson to Hoover, 26 February 1942, FBI 100–4712–302; memorandum, D. M. Ladd to Hoover, 5 March 1942, FBI 100–4712–302.

fifteen days. To rationalize continuation of the probe, Hoover cited Lindbergh's remark that America First had gone underground and planned to surface later. According to the FBI director, the committee kept itself active through frequent "house parties . . . to keep alive [political] contacts." Hoover ordered FBI field offices to review their files and then initiate investigations "for background information," but to be careful to make them "in a discreet manner so as to cause no undue publicity." Hoover urged agents to employ "confidential informants" as well as "sincere isolationists, who formerly were active in this Committee and who now realize the necessity for an all out national defense." Hoover further advised that agents "should be careful when approaching Committee members, as they might be associated with the alleged underground section of the America First Committee." The FBI director justified this investigation, like others, on the Foreign Agents Registration Act. FBI agents were "to ascertain whether the structure set up by the America First Committee is now being used by foreign interests, or by individuals cooperating with foreign interests, in such a manner as to interfere with the national defense effort."<sup>36</sup>

Special agents in charge at each FBI office initiated investigations in their geographic areas looking into the status of the America First Committee. Some of the larger field offices, such as Chicago, even submitted reports on smaller cities that fell under their jurisdiction. FBI agents closely followed Hoover's directions and used informers to gather their intelligence, and they chronicled the activities of local America First chapters dating from their origins. No SAC, however, uncovered anything to suggest that the America First Committee had gone underground in anticipation of reemerging later to become involved again in American politics. Instead, each FBI field office confirmed that all America First Committee chapters had disbanded.<sup>37</sup>

36. Memorandum, Hoover to senior FBI officials, 16 March 1942, FBI 100-4712-320; memorandum, Hoover to all SACs, 16 March 1942, FBI 100-4712-320; telegram, Hoover to all SACs, 11 May 1942, FBI 100-4712-349; telegram, Hoover to all SACs, 26 May 1942, FBI 100-4712-374; telegram, Hoover to SACs Detroit, Miami, Butte, Philadelphia, 13 June 1942, FBI 100-4712-417.

37. Report, SAC Cincinnati to FBI HQ, 25 April 1942, FBI 100-4712-337; report, SAC Huntington, WV to FBI HQ, 27 April 1942, FBI 100-4712-341; report, SAC Phoenix to FBI HQ, 28 April 1942, FBI 100-4712-342; report, SAC Springfield to FBI HQ, 8 May 1942, FBI 100-4712-346; report, SAC San Diego to FBI HQ, 9 May 1942, FBI 100-4712-354; report, SAC Norfolk to FBI HQ, 12 May 1942, FBI 100-4712-355; report, SAC Seattle to FBI HQ, 11 May 1942, FBI 100-4712-357; report, SAC New York to FBI HQ, 13 May 1942, FBI 100-4712-358; report, SAC Kansas City, MO to FBI HQ, 15 May 1942, FBI 100-4712-362; report, SAC Little Rock to FBI HQ, 18 May 1942, FBI 100-4712-363; report, SAC Jackson, MS to FBI HQ, 18 May 1942, FBI 100-4712-364; report, SAC Dallas to FBI HQ, 18 May



In late December 1941, Hoover received yet another unsolicited document that portrayed Senator Wheeler as a subversive. The document was a legal brief prepared by lawyers in the New York law firm of Phillips, Nizer, Benjamin, and Krim, and it accused the senator of having accepted

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1942, FBI 100-4712-365; report, SAC Denver to FBI HQ, 18 May 1942, FBI 100-4712-367; report, SAC Grand Rapids to FBI HQ, 16 May 1942, FBI 100-4712-368; report, SAC Indianapolis to FBI HQ, 17 May 1942, FBI 100-4712-369; report, SAC Memphis to FBI HQ, 22 May 1942, FBI 100-4712-371; report, SAC Des Moines to FBI HQ, 22 May 1942, FBI 100-4712-372; report, SAC Louisville to FBI HQ, 20 May 1942, FBI 100-4712-373; report, SAC San Juan to FBI HQ, 21 May 1942, FBI 100-4712-375; report, SAC New Haven to FBI HQ, 26 May 1942, FBI 100-4712-376; report, SAC Oklahoma City to FBI HQ, 25 May 1942, FBI 100-4712-377; report, SAC Albany to FBI HQ, 26 May 1942, FBI 100-4712-378; letter, SAC Washington, DC to FBI HQ, 26 May 1942, FBI 100-4712-380; report, SAC Salt Lake City to FBI HQ, 25 May 1942, FBI 100-4712-382; report, SAC Washington, DC to FBI HQ, 26 May 1942, FBI 100-4712-384; report, SAC Baltimore to FBI HQ, 27 May 1942, FBI 100-4712-385; report, SAC Houston to FBI HQ, 26 May 1942, FBI 100-4712-386; report, SAC Los Angeles to FBI HQ, 27 May 1942, FBI 100-4712-387; report, SAC Sioux Falls to FBI HQ, 27 May 1942, FBI 100-4712-388; report, SAC Providence to FBI HQ, 27 May 1942, FBI 100-4712-389; report, SAC Milwaukee to FBI HQ, 27 May 1942, FBI 100-4712-391; report, SAC San Antonio to FBI HQ, 28 May 1942, FBI 100-4712-392; report, SAC Charlotte to FBI HQ, 27 May 1942, FBI 100-4712-393; report, SAC New Orleans to FBI HQ, 28 May 1942, FBI 100-4712-395; report, SAC Juneau to FBI HQ, 25 May 1942, FBI 100-4712-396; report, SAC Chicago to FBI HQ, 29 May 1942, FBI 100-4712-397; report, SAC San Francisco to FBI HQ, 26 May 1942, FBI 100-4712-398; report, SAC St. Louis to FBI HQ, 28 May 1942, FBI 100-4712-404; report, SAC Newark to FBI HQ, 30 May 1942, FBI 100-4712-405; report, SAC El Paso to FBI HQ, 4 June 1942, FBI 100-4712-467; report, SAC Richmond to FBI HQ, 2 June 1942, FBI 100-4712-408; report, SAC Philadelphia to FBI HQ, 6 June 1942, FBI 100-4712-409; report, SAC Buffalo to FBI HQ, 2 June 1942, FBI 100-4712-410; report, SAC Omaha to FBI HQ, 12 June 1942, FBI 100-4712-419; report, SAC Portland to FBI HQ, 5 June 1942, FBI 100-4712-420; report, SAC Butte to FBI HQ, 13 June 1942, FBI 100-4712-427; report, SAC Kansas City to FBI HQ, 22 June 1942, FBI 100-4712-428; report, SAC Detroit to FBI HQ, 22 June 1942, FBI 100-4712-429; report, SAC San Diego to FBI HQ, 25 June 1942, FBI 100-4712-432; report, SAC Miami to FBI HQ, 23 June 1942, FBI 100-4712-433; report, SAC Milwaukee to FBI HQ, 6 July 1942, FBI 100-4712-440; report, SAC Baltimore to FBI HQ, 8 July 1942, FBI 100-4712-442; report, SAC New York to FBI HQ, 11 July 1942, FBI 100-4712-443; report, SAC Pittsburgh to FBI HQ, 1 September 1942, FBI 100-4712-458; report, SAC Salt Lake City to FBI HQ, 12 September 1942, FBI 100-4712-459; report, SAC Des Moines to FBI HQ, FBI 100-4712-460; report, SAC Salt Lake City to FBI HQ, 22 September 1942, FBI 100-4712-462; report, SAC De Moines to FBI HQ, 28 September 1942, FBI 100-4712-463; report, SAC Birmingham to FBI HQ, 1 October 1942, FBI 100-4712-465; report, SAC Cleveland to FBI HQ, 9 October 1942, FBI 100-4712-466; report, SAC San Diego to FBI HQ, 3 October 1942, FBI 100-4712-467; report, SAC Sioux Falls to FBI HQ, 15 October 1942, FBI 100-4712-470; report, SAC Indianapolis to FBI HQ, 14 October 1942, FBI 100-4712-471.



\$25,000 from German diplomats to support his opposition to Roosevelt's foreign policy. (If true, this would mean that Wheeler was in violation of the Foreign Agents Registration Act.) The brief also accused Wheeler of violating the 1917 Espionage Act for revealing—the previous July—the government's plan to occupy Iceland. Finally, the document accused the senator, as were many people at this time, of illegally using his congressional franking privilege to effect a wide distribution of anti-interventionist literature. Hoover took this unsolicited legal brief and forwarded it to the Justice Department.<sup>38</sup>

While the documentary evidence is murky, it appears that by February 1942 Attorney General Biddle had at least considered the charges as laid out in the legal brief, especially the accusation alleging that Wheeler had accepted foreign funds. Biddle solicited Hoover's opinion as to whether the department should "make a further investigation." There is no indication in Wheeler's FBI file of Hoover's reply, but a 28 February 1942 memorandum from Hoover to Wendell Berge—head of the Justice Department's Criminal Division—confirms that Berge had asked Hoover whether the FBI made an investigation. Hoover replied that the bureau had not, but the department's language in the document suggests that administration officials had regarded the charges against Wheeler as, at least, viable and that they considered pursuing them.<sup>39</sup>

While Hoover forwarded unsolicited political intelligence reports to the White House and Justice Department, in at least one instance the administration requested information from the FBI regarding Senator Wheeler. The White House's interest centered on some off-the-record remarks Wheeler had made to *Milwaukee Journal* reporter Laurence C. Eklund on 14 January 1942. Wheeler commented during his interview that the administration was too receptive to British influence and that the White House had withheld from the public how disastrous the Pearl Harbor attack really was. Wheeler, furthermore, referred to Navy Secretary Frank Knox as a "blatherskite." Because these remarks came so soon after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the reporter felt compelled to share them with the administration. But Eklund was not the White House's only source about these comments. William Donovan, director of the Office of Coordinator of Information, and Frank Knox both alerted Roosevelt to

38. Memorandum, Hoover to attorney general, 30 December 1941, FBI 62-55261-35; memorandum of Facts, Law and Exhibits re Senator Burton K. Wheeler, FBI 62-55261-35.

39. Memorandum, Attorney General Francis Biddle to Hoover, 2 February 1942, FBI 62-55261-37; memorandum, Hoover to Assistant Attorney General Wendell Berge, 28 February 1942, FBI 62-55261-44.

Wheeler's comments. Knox, moreover, editorialized that Wheeler's words constituted "the most shockingly reckless, treasonable talk that I have ever seen."<sup>40</sup>

Stephen Early, Roosevelt's secretary, thereupon asked Hoover on 26 January to verify the accuracy of Eklund's reporting and whether it could be corroborated. Early noted that "we would like very much to know," and he asked that Hoover send to the White House an FBI "report."<sup>41</sup> Acceding to the White House request, Hoover ordered FBI agents to verify Eklund's account. Milwaukee FBI agents conducted several interviews and FBI Assistant Director Ladd reported to Hoover that not only had Eklund's account been verified, but Wheeler had "rambled on at great length in a very bitter manner against the President, Secretary Knox, and England to the extent that Eklund finally had to terminate the interview himself."<sup>42</sup>

Hoover forwarded this specific information to Early on 3 February and added that "the Senator's feelings [about the president, Knox, and England] were apparent by his facial expressions as well as his remarks." What the White House did with this information is unclear; we can conclude, however, that the White House was interested enough in Wheeler's comments to have FBI agents verify their accuracy. Hoover, in his effort to kowtow to Roosevelt, was more than willing to cater to such requests.<sup>43</sup>

The best way to make sense of the FBI's monitoring of Senator Burton Wheeler is to compare it with other prominent anti-interventionists. Whereas the FBI's probe of Charles Lindbergh was extensive and thorough—owing to his popularity and many controversial public statements—the bureau's investigation of Wheeler was circumspect. While Wheeler was one of the most prominent anti-interventionists, he was also a very powerful and influential senator. This explains, for example, why

40. Letter, Richard S. Davis, *Milwaukee Journal*, to Roosevelt, 14 January 1942, FBI 62-55261-40; interview memorandum of Laurence Eklund, no date, FBI 62-55261-40; memorandum, William J. Donovan to Roosevelt, 22 January 1942, FBI 62-55261-40; memorandum, Frank Knox to Roosevelt, 23 January 1942, FBI 62-55261-40.

41. Memorandum, Stephen Early to Hoover, 26 January 1942, FBI 62-55261-40.

42. Letter, Hoover to SAC Milwaukee, 27 January 1942, FBI 62-55261-40; memorandum, D. M. Ladd to Hoover, 31 January 1942, FBI 62-55261-40.

43. Personal and confidential letter, Hoover to Early, 3 February 1942, FBI 62-55261-40; blind memorandum re Burton Wheeler, 3 February 1942, FBI 62-55261-40; personal and confidential letter, SAC Milwaukee to Hoover, 31 January 1942, FBI 62-55261-40. The heavily redacted documents include: memorandum, Louis B. Nichols to Clyde Tolson, 12 February 1942, FBI 62-55261-42 (all text deleted); Justice Department, Criminal Division document, no date, FBI 62-55261-44 (entire document withheld); memorandum, K. R. McIntire to Mr. Mumford, 17 October 1942, FBI 62-55261-45 (all text deleted); and fourteen pages of documents withheld in their entirety, FBI 62-55261-45.

Hoover only thoroughly investigated his activities with a White House request.

Further explaining the FBI's restraint in terms of Wheeler was Hoover's history with the senator. In the aftermath of the Palmer Raids and Teapot Dome scandal, Burton Wheeler and other senators led investigations that exposed illegal FBI and Justice Department activity. As such, Wheeler was well acquainted with Hoover's activities as head of the General Intelligence Division where, in the mass round-up of alleged radicals, many people's civil liberties had been violated. Undoubtedly, this history affected Hoover's probe into Wheeler's activities, leading him to not authorize any FBI investigation without prior consent from the administration. By doing this, if FBI agents' work was exposed, Hoover would be insulated.

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While Hoover would only initiate a *formal* FBI investigation that delved into an anti-interventionist congressman's or senator's political activities with authorization from the White House, he did not hesitate to move forward with FBI investigations of them for possible criminal activity. A perfect example is that of anti-interventionist Senator David I. Walsh. A Democrat from Massachusetts and chairman of the Senate Committee on Naval Affairs from 1937 to 1947, Walsh fought hard against Roosevelt's foreign policy. He tried to convince Americans that their country would be safe from any attack if its air and sea approaches were adequately defended. But by May of 1942 Walsh was named as a possible conspirator in a fraud charge.

On 4 May 1942, Roosevelt ally and attorney Morris Ernst telephoned New York SAC Foxworth alleging that Walsh was involved in a fraudulent scheme to award a \$16 million naval contract to one of his friends. Ernst claimed that Walsh's friend had been indicted in another matter and was, therefore, not eligible to receive the contract. Instead, the contract was awarded to a corporation supposedly under this man's control. Hoover advised the attorney general of the charge on 13 May, whereupon he authorized a preliminary criminal investigation. FBI agents doggedly pursued the matter that year, generating a flurry of reports between the FBI and attorney general, but nothing was developed to indicate that Walsh had been involved in any crime. Nevertheless, because he had a criminal allegation Hoover was able to pursue the matter vigorously and thereby gather derogatory information about a prominent anti-interventionist

senator without fear of public exposure. If exposed, Hoover could rightly claim the FBI was merely following up on a criminal complaint. Moreover, due to the nature of the allegation, the records generated about it were filed in the FBI's central records system.<sup>44</sup>

What is more telling about this incident, however, is what was not filed in the "official files" of the FBI, but in Hoover's secret office file. Significantly, Ernst had also tipped FBI officials off on information "concerning Senator Walsh's alleged connection with the house of degradation operated [deleted, but by Gustave Beekman] in New York City."<sup>45</sup> This "house of degradation" was a "male brothel" frequented by soldiers and sailors seeking homosexual encounters. The pro-Roosevelt *New York Post* broke this story on 6 May claiming that Walsh had visited the brothel, adding that Nazi agents routinely visited and questioned the brothel's patrons about the "comings and going of their ships."<sup>46</sup> White House officials knew about the story before it broke, however, and Hoover informed them that his only interest was the espionage side of the case. In response, the president's secretary, Marvin McIntyre, applauded Hoover's claim. (In reality, FBI officials were obsessively interested in the activities of gay and lesbian Americans, dating from 1937 when FBI agents began a systematic collection of information about gays.) Hoover, moreover, provided Justice Department official Oscar Cox with a complete FBI report, whereupon he shared it with Senator Alben Barkley, the Senate majority leader, who revealed the FBI's investigation on the floor of the Senate to demonstrate that Walsh had been cleared of any wrongdoing.<sup>47</sup> Anti-interventionist senators then publicly backed Walsh, referring to the homosexual charge as nothing but part of a "diabolical" campaign to discredit every anti-interventionist senator. Because of the sensitivity of this particular derogatory information, Hoover did not file it in the bureau's central records system—as he had with the other complaint against Walsh—but in his secret office files.<sup>48</sup>

44. Memorandum, Foxworth to Hoover, 4 May 1942, FBI 62-68060-1; memorandum, Hoover to Biddle, 13 May 1942, FBI 62-68060-1; memorandum re: Senator David I. Walsh—Alleged Fraud, 7 December 1942, FBI 62-68060-32.

45. Memorandum, Hoover to Biddle, 25 May 1942, FBI 62-68060-2.

46. *Newsweek*, 1 June 1942, 30.

47. Blind memorandum, 27 June 1942, Folder 153, David I. Walsh, Hoover O&C.

48. "FBI Clears Walsh, Barkley Asserts," *New York Times*, 21 May 1942, 6; "Tobey Asks Inquiry on Walsh Charge," *New York Times*, 22 May 1942, 10; "The Case of 'Senator X,'" *Time*, 1 June 1942, 50; "Gustav Beekman Sentenced on Morals Charge in Brooklyn," *New York Times*, 6 October 1942, 16.

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Lindbergh, Wheeler, and Walsh were leading opponents of Roosevelt's foreign policy, but the most criticized congressional anti-interventionist was Representative Hamilton Fish. During 1942, FBI agents monitored Fish's political activity, tried to develop derogatory information about him, and forwarded political intelligence to the White House that serviced its interests.

Fish, a Republican who represented Roosevelt's home district in Congress, was in many ways the president's nemesis. Like Roosevelt, Fish came from a distinguished patrician family who lived in the Hudson River Valley. Fish's great-grandfather—Nicolas Fish—was a colonel in the War for Independence who had allied himself politically with Alexander Hamilton. The congressman was also the grandson of his famous namesake, who was President Ulysses Grant's secretary of state. Like Roosevelt, Fish attended Harvard College where he also studied law (Roosevelt studied law briefly at Columbia); Fish graduated at the top of his class (Roosevelt did not). During the First World War Fish served as the company commander of an African American unit, whereas Roosevelt served as President Wilson's assistant secretary of the navy. Fish won the Silver Star and French Croix de Guerre for his service, while Roosevelt went on to run—unsuccessfully—for the vice presidency in 1920. While having many common social and political traits, in politics Fish the Republican and Roosevelt the Democrat were at polar ends.<sup>49</sup>

In 1919 Fish was elected to Congress and, partly as a result of his service with an African American unit, he garnered some support among minorities. With this constituency Fish supported antilynching legislation and helped to erect monuments to black soldiers, but this was the extent of his advocacy for minority issues. In a broader sense, however,

49. Summary memorandum re Representative Hamilton Fish, 26 September 1942, FBI 94-4-3997-33. On Fish's background see his short and politicized memoir *Hamilton Fish: Memoir of an American Patriot* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 1991), 3-31. Studies on Fish are scant. See Richard Kay Hanks, "Hamilton Fish and American Isolationism, 1920-1944" (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Riverside, 1971). The political rift between the president and Fish is evidenced by Roosevelt's invocation of Fish's name during the 1940 presidential campaign. Roosevelt stated, to the delight of a crowd in New York City, that "Great Britain would never have received an ounce of help from us if the decision had been left to [Congressmen Joseph] Martin, [Bruce] Barton and Fish." A chant of "Martin, Barton, and Fish" soon became a popular and negative political slogan. Quoted in Doris Kearns Goodwin, *No Ordinary Time, Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt: The Home Front in World War II* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 185.

Fish supported all veterans which led him to support the American Legion when it was established following the First World War. But Fish was best known for chairing a congressional committee in the 1930s, the so-called Fish Committee that had investigated communist propaganda in the United States. A staunch anticommunist, Fish opposed the Roosevelt administration's recognition of the Soviet Union.<sup>50</sup>

Irrespective of Fish's anticommunism, FBI officials took an interest in him after he began to oppose Roosevelt's foreign policy, but particularly since he was the ranking minority member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. When it came to supporting either anticommunists or President Roosevelt, Hoover—the shrewd bureaucrat that he was—chose Roosevelt. Since 1932, Fish had opposed Roosevelt and his New Deal because of “its socialist nature” and the dangers Fish perceived in Roosevelt's increasingly centralized power—especially in foreign relations. As the congressman later wrote in his memoir: “Roosevelt, I believed, was starting us down the road to socialism and dictatorship.”<sup>51</sup>

An FBI summary memorandum from late 1942 confirms FBI officials' interest in Fish's opposition to Roosevelt's foreign policy. The agent writing the memo noted that a review of Fish's congressional votes “reflects his isolationist trend of thought.” The agent also took special note of the positions Fish took in opposition to the president: from military appropriations in 1938 to conscription to lend-lease. None of this information had anything to do with a law violation that would justify FBI interest. Of particular concern to FBI officials, according to this memorandum, was Fish's opposition to lend-lease, which marked the height of the foreign policy debate. The FBI agent also noted Fish's connections to the Committee to Keep America Out of Foreign Wars and the America First Committee, his various anti-interventionist statements, and that his name was mentioned by the German-language newspaper *Deutscher Weckruf und Beobachter* and other radical publications. The memorandum stands as evidence that FBI officials took great interest in anti-interventionist political activity, especially where it intersected with the political efforts and goals of the Roosevelt administration.<sup>52</sup>

50. Fish, *Memoir of a Patriot*, 32–39; summary memorandum re Representative Hamilton Fish, 26 September 1942, FBI 94–4–3997–33, pp. 3–6.

51. Fish, *Memoir of an American Patriot*, 56.

52. Summary memorandum re Representative Hamilton Fish, 26 September 1942, FBI 94–4–3997–33. It is important to note that the summary memo surveys all information maintained in the “official” files of the FBI and not necessarily all information maintained on Fish which could have been maintained in one of J. Edgar Hoover's various secret office files.

By May 1942—a congressional election year and a time when foreign policy critics still concerned the administration—the White House learned of some titillating political gossip involving Fish which led them to request an FBI investigation. Roosevelt's appointments secretary, Edwin Watson, learned from New York political sources that Fish had allegedly received and endorsed suspicious checks amounting to several hundred thousand dollars. Watson then forwarded this information to Hoover who ordered an FBI investigation.<sup>53</sup>

In their investigation, FBI agents interviewed Mrs. Vanderbilt Webb, head of the committee opposing Fish's reelection, as well as her confidant, Henry Hoke—who had initially publicized the congressional franking-privilege controversy. Mrs. Webb claimed that Fish had accepted two checks totaling \$3,000 from a German caviar retailer by the name of Sturm. When FBI agents interviewed Hoke, he claimed that Fish had accepted checks in 1940 totaling \$2,500 from the Romanoff Caviar Company and, more important, that the Treasury Department had possession of the checks "in connection with an income tax violation."<sup>54</sup>

When reporting these developments to the White House, Hoover noted that the bureau's investigation was "being afforded vigorous attention." In the meantime, Hoover relayed that G. F. Hansen-Sturm, the caviar businessman, had discussed neutrality issues with Fish and had requested five thousand copies of a Fish speech for a business associate. Given Fish's role in the Viereck-led congressional franking scandal, Hoover regarded this particular connection as suspicious. He ordered an investigation to determine whether Fish had violated the Foreign Agents Registration Act, and he advised the White House that if any information was developed that would "interest the president" he would pass it along.<sup>55</sup>

While Hoover had FBI agents looking into Fish's activities, the congressman learned of the charges and the FBI's questioning of Webb. Fish also learned that "some FBI man had knowledge of, or had shown some checks" to one of his constituents, leading him to telephone Assistant FBI Director Tamm. Returning Fish's phone call, Tamm claimed the FBI had "no information about any such checks in the amounts or any similar

53. Confidential memorandum for Edgar Hoover, 4 May 1942, Official File 10-B, FDRL; letter, Franklin A. Schriver to Watson, 23 April 1942, Official File 300, FDRL; personal and confidential letter, Hoover to Secretary to the President Edwin M. Watson, 13 May 1942, Official File 10-B, FDRL.

54. Ibid.

55. Personal and confidential letter, Hoover to Secretary to the President Edwin M. Watson, 13 May 1942, Official File 10-B, FDRL.



amounts” and that the FBI was “conducting no such investigation.” Tamm suggested to Fish that people often confused other federal agencies and their investigations with the FBI, and that he should check with those agencies. Fish, nevertheless, explained that “the check was a forgery if it existed, and it was put out for political purposes.”<sup>56</sup>

Tamm might have denied any FBI investigation, but just one month before Fish’s phone call Hoover had provided the White House with information specifically about Fish’s checks. Given the political nature (and thus the sensitivity) of the FBI’s interest, it is no wonder that Tamm made blanket denials to Fish, especially as 1942 was an election year. But Fish’s claim that an FBI agent had shown checks to a constituent led Tamm and Assistant Director Ladd to look into the matter. In the inquiry the Albany field office denied any knowledge of the incident, but because significant portions of Tamm’s memorandum have been redacted we do not know what they discovered. In any event, the incident further illustrates the FBI’s catering to administration political interests and their concern with keeping these efforts secret.<sup>57</sup>

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Interestingly, British Security Coordination also noted the matter of Fish accepting checks from Hansen-Sturm. According to the British account, BSC agents conducted a “straightforward intelligence job” to “discredit” a number of “particular personalities,” including Fish. The BSC history gives no details—which is typical—and only notes that copies of checks from Hansen-Sturm to Fish “were obtained.” One might logically presume that since Henry Hoke was involved in this affair—as with the franking privilege controversy—and since the BSC history claims he had cooperated with them regarding the congressional frank, that he may have been the person to share the checks with the BSC. While this conclusion cannot be confirmed without access to closed British and American records, it does fit the BSC pattern of operations.<sup>58</sup>

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In August 1942, FBI officials again focused on Fish’s receipt of money from

56. Memorandum, Tamm to Hoover, 22 June 1942, FBI 94-4-3997-3.

57. Memorandum, Tamm to Ladd, 22 June 1942, FBI 65-29514-23; (second) memorandum, Tamm to Ladd, 2 June 1942, FBI 65-29514-23.

58. *British Security Coordination*, 73-74, 75.



questionable sources. This time the FBI's interest followed a *Washington Post* story published on 6 August reporting that Fish had received \$25,000 from General Rafael Trujillo, the right-wing military dictator of the Dominican Republic. According to the article, Fish had received this money in July 1939, but had only declared \$22,000 on his income tax return—seemingly committing income tax evasion if not violating the Foreign Agents Registration Act. The newspaper further reported that Fish had received some of the money directly, and some of it from oil stocks.<sup>59</sup>

After the story broke, FBI Assistant Director Ladd briefed Hoover that the bureau had no information concerning Fish's payment. He then ordered an expedited and "complete survey" of all FBI information about Fish, but when completed it only confirmed the FBI's ignorance. Meanwhile, Fish responded to the story calling it a "political smear campaign" and claimed that he had not accepted any "fee" from Trujillo. Instead, Fish claimed that he had "merely acted as an agent for the general" in handling an oil-speculation deal which, by law, did not need to be reported on his 1939 tax return. Fish explained that he had lost a significant portion of the general's money in oil stocks and had returned the remainder to him. He further claimed that the Internal Revenue Bureau had never asked him about the transaction, as had been reported. Whatever the truth, the story dominated Fish's reelection campaign and interested FBI officials.<sup>60</sup>

What interested the FBI most was the relationship between the congressman and Trujillo. Coming so soon after the Viereck-Hill franking controversy and popular notions that anti-interventionists—in particular Hamilton Fish—were themselves fascists or dupes of the Nazis, the fact that Fish had a relationship with a right-wing foreign dictator concerned some. In their probe, FBI agents learned that Fish had visited the Dominican Republic as part of a goodwill visit in March 1939, and that Trujillo returned the favor the previous July (when Fish had allegedly received his fee) by visiting New York City. Fish then made favorable remarks about the general at a banquet, saying that he was "proud to repeat at this time to a United States audience, you will go down in the history of your country

59. "Secret \$25,000 Fee Paid to Hamilton Fish by Foreign Power; U. S. Investigating," *Washington Post*, 6 August 1942; summary memorandum re Representative Hamilton Fish, 26 September 1942, FBI 94-4-3997-33, p. 15.

60. Memorandum, Ladd to Hoover, 6 August 1942, FBI 65-29514-(illegible); memorandum, Ladd to Hoover, 8 August 1942, FBI 65-29514-25; summary memorandum re Representative Hamilton Fish, 26 September 1942, FBI 94-4-3997-33, p. 16; "Fish Denies He Got Fee from Trujillo," *New York Times*, 7 August 1942, 15. Fish was reelected that year, but was finally defeated in 1944.

as a builder greater than all the Spanish Conquistadores together.” Though made in 1939, by 1942 the comment took on a new significance in terms of the FBI’s suspicions about Fish.<sup>61</sup>

FBI officials took great interest in the money Trujillo had given to Fish, but their specific interest, and what they learned, is unknowable due to redactions in FBI documents. Hoover ordered the FBI’s New York field office to report on Trujillo’s visit and Fish’s meeting with him “in order that any further information in this case may be immediately brought to the attention of the White House officials.” While the details of what FBI agents had learned and reported are murky, it is clear that Hoover kept the White House informed as to the political activities of the president’s nemesis, Fish.<sup>62</sup>

There is no indication that the White House had solicited any of this particular information about Fish, but it did receive information about Fish and Trujillo from Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles. The secretary informed Roosevelt about the Fish-Trujillo affair before the *Washington Post* even broke the story, revealing that the federal grand jury investigating the franking case had discovered the payment information. Because Trujillo’s money allegedly originated from a German source, federal prosecutor Maloney forwarded the information to Assistant Secretary of State Berle. While Berle concluded there had been no transgression, Welles nevertheless shared it with Roosevelt, satisfying the president’s interest and explaining why he had not sought an FBI probe.<sup>63</sup>

Interestingly, in 1951 Fish learned that the Justice Department had considered him a fascist during the 1930s and 1940s. Concerned with these old allegations at the height of McCarthyism, Fish, who considered himself a stalwart anticommunist, visited FBI headquarters to request access to his FBI file. An FBI official advised the former thirteen-term congressman that FBI files were confidential and not open to external review, at which point Fish felt compelled to explain his past actions to set his record straight. According to Fish’s 1951 account, Internal Revenue investigators

61. Summary memorandum re Representative Hamilton Fish, 26 September 1942, FBI 94-4-3997-33, pp. 16-17. It should be noted that as part of his Good Neighbor Policy Roosevelt also met with Trujillo in 1939 when he visited the United States. When critics brought up the fact that Trujillo was a dictator, Roosevelt reportedly said: “He may be an S.O.B., but he is our S.O.B.” Quoted in Thomas G. Paterson et al., *American Foreign Relations: A History*, vol. 2, 4th ed. (Lexington: D. C. Heath, 1995), 188.

62. Memorandum, Ladd to Hoover, 4 September 1942, FBI 65-29514-(illegible); memorandum, Tamm to Ladd, 5 September 1942, FBI 65-29514-32.

63. Letter and enclosure, Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles to Roosevelt, 27 July 1942, President’s Secretary’s File, Confidential File, State Department, FDRL.

had approached him for not reporting the questionable checks on his income tax return, but he convinced them that the incident was benign. Nevertheless, Fish believed the Internal Revenue Bureau's interest was nothing but a Roosevelt administration effort to "get him."<sup>64</sup>

By the late summer of 1942, the White House asked the FBI to look into one last matter concerning Fish. On 22 August, Colonel Harman Beukema—an instructor at West Point—wrote Presidential Secretary Watson that Fish possessed a photograph of Roosevelt's Hyde Park library showing a British flag displayed above an American one. According to Beukema, Fish believed he could use the photo to "hang the president" politically. Sensitive to this report, Roosevelt directed another of his secretaries, Marvin McIntyre, to "have the F.B.I. look into this." Hoover replied that the alleged photo was in reality a sketch and, according to Fish's confidants, the congressman believed it could be used "if he wanted to cause a lot of damage to President Roosevelt." Fish, Hoover reported, had decided against using the sketch. As compared to Fish's other activities this one pales in significance, but it is illustrative of how Roosevelt often relied upon the FBI to verify politically sensitive information and how the FBI, at this point, operated as the intelligence arm of the White House.<sup>65</sup>

64. Memorandum, L. L. Laughlin to A. H. Belmont, 17 February 1951, FBI 65-29514-45.

65. Letter, Herman Beukema to Watson, 22 August 1942; memorandum, Roosevelt to McIntyre, 3 September 1942; confidential memorandum, McIntyre to Hoover, 4 September 1942; personal and confidential memorandum, Hoover to McIntyre, 9 September 1942; personal and confidential memorandum, Hoover to McIntyre, 6 November 1942, all in Official File 10-B, FDRL.

## Retribution

### The FBI and the Victory Program Leak

4 December 1941 to Mid-1942

On 4 December 1941, the *Chicago Tribune* and its sister paper, the *Washington Times-Herald*, published a sensational story that reverberated in the already bitter and deadlocked anti-interventionist/interventionist foreign policy debate.<sup>1</sup> Just three days before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the two newspapers exposed a top-secret War Department contingency plan commonly referred to in government circles as the Victory Program. Carried under the banner headline “F.D.R.’S WAR PLANS!” the story seemed to confirm the darkest suspicion of the anti-interventionists who saw the plan as evidence of Roosevelt’s duplicity and being intent on leading the United States into the European war. Interventionists, on the other hand, viewed the revelation as traitorous behavior on the part of Roosevelt’s critics.

The political consequences of this leak triggered an investigation to identify who had provided the secret military plan to the *Chicago Tribune*. As the country’s chief federal law enforcement agency, the FBI was delegated the responsibility, rather than the military, for determining who had leaked the document. In the ensuing investigation, FBI Director Hoover spared no effort and, indeed, the affair reflected his pragmatism whereby in return for placating administration desires he gained increased favor among administration personnel. He likely pursued the matter with such élan as some high-ranking members of the Roosevelt administration avidly sought to hold the anti-interventionists responsible for the leak. Yet the

1. Robert McCormick’s *Chicago Tribune* was loosely connected, by familial ties, to papers of similar political ilk. Joseph Patterson, his cousin, founded the *New York Daily News* and his other cousin, Cissy Patterson, was publisher of the *Washington Times Herald*. See Richard Norton Smith’s *The Colonel: The Life and Legend of Robert R. McCormick* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).

leak of the plan was not the national security breach that some perceived; rather, as a contingency plan only, its revelation served to embarrass the administration and give political fire to the anti-interventionists. By servicing administration interests, Hoover placed himself in good standing with leading officials in the administration.

The leak and subsequent investigation did not have legs, however, as a major issue for Americans. Because the plan was revealed just days before the American entrance into the Second World War, it was overshadowed quickly in the public mind and the press. Nevertheless, the issue stirred deeply held emotions on both sides of the foreign policy debate, even extending into 1942. The investigation, moreover, reached and involved many prominent members of the anti-interventionist community to include one U.S. representative, two U.S. senators, a host of military officers, Charles Lindbergh, Henry Ford, and reporters and staff from the *Chicago Tribune*. Until now, the FBI's investigation in this episode has never before been fully documented.<sup>2</sup>

The person most responsible for developing the Victory Program, and the man who became a primary focus of FBI investigators, was army major Albert C. Wedemeyer. A brief sketch of Wedemeyer's biography suggests why he became the focus of government investigators, why some of his beliefs interested FBI agents, and, finally, why he acted as he did in the face of an FBI investigation. A native Nebraskan of German extraction, Wedemeyer received a Jesuit education steeped in ideals of duty and obligation. Following his high school graduation, in 1916 Wedemeyer won an appointment to the United States Military Academy at West Point from Senator George W. Norris. With the crisis of the Great War of 1914–18 and America's late entrance into that conflict, Wedemeyer was graduated early from the academy but never participated in any combat. Then, in the immediate postwar years, as a newly minted junior officer, Wedemeyer studied infantry tactics and was assigned duty as a military instructor and later assumed command of an artillery unit.<sup>3</sup>

As an army officer, Wedemeyer served in a variety of capacities between 1923 and 1934. He spent three years in the Philippines as an

2. The leak of the Victory Program has been referred to countless times in books and articles, but there are two books that describe the creation of the plan itself (see below). The only works that describe the FBI's investigation are Albert Wedemeyer's memoir, which only concerns his involvement, and a sketchy and speculative article by Thomas Fleming. See note 71.

3. Charles E. Kirkpatrick, *An Unknown Future and a Doubtful Present: Writing the Victory Plan of 1941* (Washington, DC: Center for Military History, 1990), 6–7.

infantry officer, and then became a staff officer. Assigned staff duty in Washington, D.C., China, and the Philippines (again), Wedemeyer learned the finer details of army staff work. His work then won him, in 1934, an appointment to the Command and General Staff College in Leavenworth, Kansas, where he graduated with honors. The college's commandant was so impressed with Wedemeyer's work that he nominated him to study European military tactics in Germany at the *Kriegsakademie*, the German Staff College. So, in 1936, Wedemeyer departed for Germany.<sup>4</sup>

During his two-year stint in Berlin, Wedemeyer learned much in the way of war making and war preparation. But his trip, while decidedly useful in expanding his understanding of military preparedness, in later years led investigators to question the officer's loyalties amid popular notions of Nazi intrigue among America Firsters—which included Wedemeyer. Adding to his later troubles, during his brief assignment in Germany, Wedemeyer was afforded special privileges not commonly granted foreign visitors. He participated in German military maneuvers and cultivated personal relationships with several high-ranking members of the German military, including Claus von Stauffenberg, Major Ferdinand Jodl—brother to Hitler's later army chief of staff—and the army chief of staff, Ludwig Beck. Wedemeyer learned much about German preparedness and strategy from his German contacts. His tour proved to be so valuable that upon its conclusion he submitted a report in 1938 to General George Marshall, then chief of the War Plans Division. Undoubtedly impressed by this report, Marshall later elevated Wedemeyer to the War Plans Division in May 1941, by which time Marshall had risen to chief of staff.<sup>5</sup>

Wedemeyer's time in Germany also contributed to his later anti-interventionism. Writing in 1958, Wedemeyer stated that during his stay in Germany he had “discerned a great deal of truth about Communist aims, practices, and methods unknown or ignored in America until recently.”<sup>6</sup> He had also come to regard Nazi Germany in a positive fashion. “[M]y two years experience with the German people in general and the military pedagogy in particular,” he wrote Walter Trohan, “had caused me to render favorable reports concerning them.”<sup>7</sup> Wedemeyer, moreover, saw in Nazi Germany a bulwark against Communist Russia. To him “the German search for *Lebensraum* did not menace the Western World to anything

4. Ibid., 7–9.

5. Ibid., 9–11.

6. Albert C. Wedemeyer, *Wedemeyer Reports!* 4.

7. Letter, Wedemeyer to Walter Trohan, 27 November 1953, Wedemeyer Papers, Box 139, Hoover Institution Archives (hereafter HIA), Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA.

like the same degree as the worldwide Communist conspiracy centered in Moscow.” Wedemeyer’s views, as such, shared a common thread with those of another ardent anti-interventionist, Charles Lindbergh. Both Wedemeyer and Lindbergh had spent time in Nazi Germany between 1936 and 1938, and both were impressed with what they had seen. Both, moreover, wrote favorable reports on German progress. Probably with no surprise, both men subsequently became targets of FBI investigations due, in part, to suspicions cast by their time spent in Nazi Germany.<sup>8</sup>

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Following passage of the Lend-Lease Act in March 1941, the American government was faced with the task of arranging procurement of war-related matériel for Great Britain. The War Department was delegated responsibility for determining the projected needs of lend-lease, but was given no specific direction from senior administration officials. War Department personnel nevertheless began to develop various plans to cope with lend-lease needs. Finding it difficult to develop a viable scheme without administration direction, Undersecretary of War Robert Patterson requested from his superior—Secretary of War Stimson—an estimate of the overall needs of a possible wartime American industry. On 18 April he requested “a decision as to the ultimate munitions production required by the War Department so that appropriate plans can be started.”<sup>9</sup>

According to the official history of the Victory Program, Secretary Stimson wholeheartedly agreed with the undersecretary’s desire for more specific direction. The War Department continued to fumble about developing a plan for which military officials had no national strategic goals or estimates. That is, until 9 July 1941, when President Roosevelt finally stepped in and ordered his secretaries of war and navy to explore “at once the overall production requirements required to defeat our potential enemies.” The official history suggests that Undersecretary Patterson’s executive officer, General Burns, who was the War Department’s liaison to the White House, had influenced lend-lease supervisor Harry Hopkins to

8. Wedemeyer, *Wedemeyer Reports!* 10–12; Wayne S. Cole, *Charles A. Lindbergh and the Battle against American Intervention in World War II* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), 33–37.

9. Memorandum, Undersecretary of War Robert Patterson to Secretary of War Henry Stimson, 18 April 1941, reprinted in Mark Skinner Watson, *United States Army in World War II, the War Department, Chief of Staff: Prewar Plans and Preparations* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1950), 332.

bring pressure upon the White House for direction. Whatever the manner of events, Roosevelt's directive, after a period of confusion, put the department on track.<sup>10</sup>

Soon thereafter, responsibility for drawing up a global wartime contingency plan devolved from the secretary of war to General Marshall to General Leonard Gerow of the War Plans Division—the unit responsible for creating military plans—and finally to Major Albert C. Wedemeyer. As Wedemeyer later pointed out, never before had American military authorities devised such an all-encompassing plan. “It meant traveling on uncharted seas without a compass toward a fatal Shangri-la,” Wedemeyer wrote, “since no national aims or strategic objectives were given us.” Despite this impediment, Wedemeyer coordinated with other government departments to acquire the information he needed. Due to the project's sensitivity, however, all work was carried out in secret. The navy concurrently drafted its own estimates that were subsequently added to the larger plan War Department officials had developed.<sup>11</sup>

Wedemeyer was an ironic choice to develop a contingency plan designed “to defeat our potential enemies.” While being selected to piece together the Victory Program, Albert Wedemeyer was also a confirmed advocate of American isolation from foreign war. Or, in the view of interventionists, Wedemeyer was an isolationist. From his broad reading on war and national strategic planning, Wedemeyer was convinced that American involvement in a second worldwide military conflict would lead only to national devastation. Yet, despite his underlying anti-interventionist political views, Wedemeyer's Jesuitical and military sense of duty kept him focused on his assigned task. “It was my job,” he wrote years later, “to anticipate developments and continuously make plans so that my country would be prepared for any contingency which fate, politicians, or power-drunk leaders might precipitate.”<sup>12</sup>

Working with a staff of six, Wedemeyer set about developing a national plan for wartime production estimates. But the major still lacked two key pieces of information to create a coherent plan: a national wartime objective and a military strategy to realize that objective. Without such direction from the administration, which was never formally decided upon in 1941,

10. Letter, Roosevelt to Secretaries of War and Navy, 9 July 1941, reprinted in *ibid.*, 338–39.

11. Wedemeyer, *Wedemeyer Reports!* 16–17; blind memorandum, publication in *Chicago Tribune* and *Washington Times-Herald* of Army and Navy Estimate of United States Over-All Production Requirements, 5 December 1941, FBI 65–39945–23.

12. Wedemeyer, *Wedemeyer Reports!* 14.



Wedemeyer could not arrive at any useful figures. On his own, therefore, he drafted an assessment of national objectives and submitted this statement to Secretary of War Stimson for approval. Stimson approved the major's statement after which Wedemeyer devised a plan that was based on the assumption that the United States would "eliminate totalitarianism from Europe," ally itself with Great Britain, and "deny the Japanese undisputed control of the western Pacific."<sup>13</sup>

Wedemeyer's staff worked diligently on the Victory Program throughout the summer of 1941, and in a relatively short period of time—from July, when Roosevelt requested a national estimate, to September, when the army's plan was submitted—they completed their task. A vast number of government resources were used to create a politico-military plan of a scale never before seen in American history. Between 20 and 25 September the completed plan was distributed to the highest-ranking members of the War Department and later given to the president. But Wedemeyer's sense of accomplishment was quickly dashed when, on 4 December 1941, the fruits of his top-secret labor received banner headlines in two of the nation's most prominent anti-interventionist newspapers.<sup>14</sup>



Following the *Chicago Tribune's* and *Washington Times-Herald's* published account of the Victory Program, Wedemeyer's life became markedly uncomfortable. He vividly recalled that morning when he arrived at his office in the Munitions Building:

I sensed at once an atmosphere of excitement. Officers were milling around and there was a buzz of conversation which ceased abruptly as my secretary, in visible agitation, handed me a copy of the *Washington Times-Herald*. The room was silent and all eyes were fixed upon me as I read the screaming banner headlines. . . . I could not have been more appalled and astounded if a bomb had been dropped on Washington.<sup>15</sup>

13. Kirkpatrick, *An Unknown Future*, 60–62; interview with General Wedemeyer, 24 April 1987, quoted in Kirkpatrick, *An Unknown Future*, 63.

14. Blind memorandum, publication in *Chicago Tribune* and *Washington Times-Herald* of Army and Navy Estimate of United States Over-All Production Requirements, 5 December 1941, FBI 65–39945–23. For detailed histories of the compilation of the Victory Program, see Kirkpatrick, *An Unknown Future*, and Watson, *United States Army in World War II*.

15. Wedemeyer, *Wedemeyer Reports!* 15–16.

The developer of the top-secret contingency plan had cause to be worried, for he was responsible, to a large degree, for its security. The newspaper story, written by the *Tribune's* Chesly Manly, gave details of the plan, including its estimates for a 10,000,000-plus-man combined armed force consisting of a 1,100,000-man navy, a 150,000-man marine corps, a 6,745,000-man army, and a 2,050,000-man army air force. Additionally, the article reprinted in its entirety President Roosevelt's 9 July memorandum authorizing the plan to his war secretaries. Quoting extensively from the Victory Program, the anti-interventionist paper concluded that the plan was proof that Roosevelt had no intention of keeping American armed forces within the Western Hemisphere, as he had previously promised. The story became an immediate political sensation.<sup>16</sup>

Anti-interventionists depicted the revelation as a smoking gun. To them, the Victory Program was clear evidence that Roosevelt had been purposefully maneuvering the country into war. Moreover, anti-interventionists planned to use the revelation to their advantage. Ruth Sarles, director of the America First Committee's speakers bureau, advocated distributing the plan across the country "in tens of thousands." She hoped "that every speaker who goes on the platform for AF [America First] will denounce it in ringing terms, that all will hammer 'No AEF' [American Expeditionary Force]."<sup>17</sup> One Republican anti-interventionist congressman, H. Carl Anderson of Minnesota, remarked to an America First representative that the publication "vindicates what we have been saying right along. A blind man could see through it all." Republican Dan Reed of New York predicted that "[w]hen this story gets around to the people it will strengthen our cause greatly."<sup>18</sup>

Interventionists, on the other hand, viewed the leak in strikingly different terms. Senator Carter Glass of Virginia, honorary chairman of the rabidly interventionist Fight for Freedom Committee, commented that "the freedom of the press was never intended to extend to people who treasonably make public army and navy secret plans."<sup>19</sup> "It was a scandalous

16. *Washington Times-Herald*, 4 December 1941.

17. Letter, Ruth Sarles to R. Douglas Stuart Jr., 6 December 1941, America First Committee Papers, Box 239, HIA.

18. General Report, Fred Burdick, 4 December 1941, in Justus D. Doenecke, ed., *In Danger Undaunted: The Anti-Interventionist Movement of 1940–1941 as Revealed in the Papers of the America First Committee* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1990), 436–38. This compilation of documents is an extremely useful resource. The America First Committee papers are still woefully unorganized and, thus, very difficult to research without spending an inordinate amount of time sifting through hundreds of vaguely marked boxes and folders.

19. Letter, Senator Carter Glass to Bishop Henry W. Hobson, 8 December 1941, Fight

thing to have happen,” Secretary of War Stimson noted in his diary, “and was typical of the mental attitude of the isolationists at that time.”<sup>20</sup> And whereas the anti-interventionists hoped to use the Victory Program to stimulate opposition to Roosevelt’s foreign policy, Stimson had a related, if opposing, objective: “The thing to do is to meet the matter head on and use this occurrence if possible to shake our American people out of their infernal apathy and ignorance of what this war means.”<sup>21</sup>

The White House also deliberated over how to handle the situation. On the morning of 4 December, according to Secretary Stimson’s account, without having consulted with the president, White House Press Secretary Steven Early held a press conference. Early stated that no one in the White House but the president had knowledge of the Victory Program. When asked if there were any conflicts of interest for other newspapers to reprint the Manly story without violating voluntary censorship restrictions, Early replied: “I don’t think anyone would be correct in printing it unless they got it from a government source, unless they attributed it to the paper that built the story.” He added, “I consider the press is operating as a free press and the responsibility in this case is more on government than the press, if the story is true.” This awkward response prompted a further question as to whether the White House considered the publication as treasonable or unpatriotic. “Your right to print,” Early replied, “is unchallenged and unquestioned.”<sup>22</sup>

At the War Department that morning, Secretary of War Stimson recorded in his diary that officials there, such as Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy, had “very long faces.” To him “nothing more unpatriotic or damaging to our plans for defense could very well be conceived” than that done by the anti-interventionist press. Concerned about Early’s comments at his press conference earlier that morning, Stimson immediately phoned Roosevelt. The secretary characterized Early’s comments as feeble and, according to Stimson, Roosevelt agreed with him. Moreover, the whole issue of the leak, Stimson claimed, caused the president to be “full of fight.” Apparently sensing Roosevelt’s mood, Stimson suggested prosecuting those involved in the leak under the Espionage Act. Roosevelt “was

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for Freedom Manuscripts (hereafter FFF), Box 10, Seeley G. Mudd Library, Princeton University.

20. Entry for 24 February 1942, Henry Lewis Stimson Diaries, 37:155 (microfilm ed., reel 7), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT.

21. Entry for 4 December 1941, Stimson Diaries, 36:74 (microfilm ed., reel 7).

22. Notes of Stephen Early press conference in confidential report, Joseph A. Genau, 15 January 1942, FBI 65–399454–3.

delighted to hear this” because he had previously been advised that no violation of the act had occurred. In the meantime, the president directed “that we should not answer any questions about it at our press conferences and that the first action taken should be the arrest of those responsible for the disclosure, including if possible the managers of the newspapers.”<sup>23</sup>

After further deliberation, Stimson concluded that the president’s policy of not speaking out on the leak was wrong. The secretary drafted a statement, phoned the president, and read it to him. Advising the president that the War Department had a scheduled press conference that morning and he “didn’t want to duck such an important matter,” Stimson asked Roosevelt to allow him to make a public statement. Roosevelt agreed and authorized Stimson’s press statement.<sup>24</sup>

That day, Roosevelt also had scheduled a press conference. Preferring to allow his war secretary to comment first, Stimson found his press room “jammed as never before—people standing up all around me.”<sup>25</sup> The secretary offered reporters a forceful and positive statement followed by two questions. He outlined the War Department’s responsibilities:

It does not preclude the study of possible eventualities, one of the primary duties and responsibilities of the War Department. . . . Failures to make such studies would constitute a serious dereliction on the part of the responsible military authorities. The object of the study referred to by the press was to determine production requirements. . . . We are not preparing troops nor have we asked for funds for an A.E.F.

What would you think of an American General Staff which in the present condition of the world did not investigate and study every conceivable type of emergency which may confront this country, and every possible method of meeting that emergency? What do you think of the patriotism of a man or newspaper which would take those confidential studies and make them public to the enemies of this country?<sup>26</sup>

23. Entry for 4 December 1941, Stimson Diaries, 36:73–4 (microfilm ed., reel 7). On the Roosevelt administration’s and FBI’s concerns with the “isolationist” press, see Athan Theoharis, “The FBI, the Roosevelt Administration, and the ‘Subversive’ Press,” *Journalism History* 19 (Spring 1993): 3–10. For an analysis of Roosevelt’s use of mass media to advance his foreign policy agenda, see Richard W. Steele, “The Great Debate: Roosevelt, the Media, and the Coming of the War, 1940–1941,” *Journal of American History* 71 (June 1984): 69–92.

24. Entry for 5 December 1941, Stimson Diaries, 36:75 (microfilm ed., reel 7).

25. Ibid.

26. Statement made by Secretary of War Stimson, 5 December 1941, reprinted in Watson, *United States Army in World War II*, 359.

At a cabinet meeting later that day, Roosevelt explained to his department heads his decision to permit Stimson's comment. While most of the cabinet supported the president's decision, not everyone agreed fully with what Stimson had said. Harold Ickes, ardent opponent of the anti-interventionists, found it to be "entirely too defensive." Vice President Henry Wallace agreed with Stimson but objected to the questions following the secretary's statement. In any event, Stimson was not deterred. To him, the "extremely weak" comments of Press Secretary Early, "which virtually condoned the publication of the statement [Victory Program] on the basis of Freedom of the Press," justified his action.<sup>27</sup>

Much of the cabinet meeting was spent discussing whether to prosecute those responsible for the Victory Program leak. Ickes urged the president to go forward with prosecutions against the *Chicago Tribune* and *Washington Times-Herald*. The question over whether the Espionage Act offered an avenue to exploit was settled, to the cabinet's satisfaction, when Attorney General Biddle defended such action. Then, following the meeting, Stimson pressed Roosevelt to pursue charges of conspiracy against those involved. The secretary, moreover, demanded that the charges be broad and not narrowly focused because, he thought, "it is vitally important to make . . . a great State prosecution to get rid of this infernal disloyalty which we now have working in the America First and in these McCormick family papers." Roosevelt also met privately with Biddle, who confidentially advised the president that Hoover had learned "that at least one copy [of the Victory Program] had been handed to a Senator and that Wheeler was talking about investigation." Keenly interested in this information, Roosevelt promised not to share the details with any other cabinet members. Given the charged atmosphere created with the leak, Biddle probably feared the worst if unsubstantiated information was leaked from the White House. In any event, Biddle authorized the FBI to investigate.<sup>28</sup>

FBI Director Hoover, in this politically charged atmosphere, found himself front and center in an issue he could use to cater to the political desires of certain powerful administration officials who sought retribution against anti-interventionist critics. He brought to bear the full resources of the FBI. On 4 December, Hoover, accompanied by FBI Assistant Director Edward Tamm, met with Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox and other

27. Entry for 5 December 1941, Stimson Diaries, 36:76 (microfilm ed., reel 7).

28. Entry for 5 December 1941, Stimson Diaries, 36:76 (microfilm ed., reel 7); Harold L. Ickes, *The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954), 3:659; notes on 5 December 1941 Cabinet meeting, 1941 Cabinet meetings folder, Francis Biddle Papers, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library (hereafter FDRL), Hyde Park, NY.

high-ranking Navy Department officials to discuss the Victory Program leak, the navy's contribution to it, and how the report had been distributed. Revealing his priority to focus on the administration's policy critics, Hoover further inquired of the navy officials "as to whether any dissension or opposition had been expressed toward the plans." Other than disagreement over whether the plan was practical, the officers could offer no information on internal opposition to the plan itself. Navy officials gave Hoover a registered copy of the Victory Program to assist FBI investigators.<sup>29</sup>

Using this copy of the Victory Program, FBI agents immediately compared the actual contingency plan with that published by the anti-interventionist press. In so doing, the FBI's investigators focused on the thirty-five quotations made public from the Victory Program. Each quotation was scrutinized and any inconsistency between the two documents was laid out in full detail. While FBI officials found numerous minor and insignificant discrepancies—such as a misplaced comma or an omitted word—they nevertheless concluded that the press indeed had had access to the secret Victory Program.<sup>30</sup>

While the FBI began its probe, General Gerow informed Wedemeyer that the president had ordered an investigation. Wedemeyer replied that he had not leaked any documents, but, he later wrote, "I could not be certain that I had never neglected to exercise proper precautions." Gerow, having worked with Wedemeyer (who by now had been promoted to colonel) and having known him personally, expressed his trust in the man. Given Wedemeyer's known anti-interventionist political sympathies, however, and the fact that he was responsible for piecing together the plan, others suspected he was guilty. Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy, still new in his position, ordered Wedemeyer to his office to discuss the matter. While Colonel Wedemeyer stood at attention, according to his own account, McCloy said to him: "Wedemeyer, there is blood on the fingers of the person who is responsible for the release of this top secret war plan to the newspapers."<sup>31</sup>

Shortly afterward, on 9 December, Wedemeyer was visited not unexpectedly by two FBI officials, one of whom was Edward Tamm—Hoover's

29. Memorandum (for file), author unknown, 4 December 1941, FBI 65-39945-16. The FBI has withheld several pages of this document and, thus, the author cannot be determined.

30. Memorandum (for file), Attorney General Francis Biddle, 6 December 1941, Biddle Papers, FDRL; memorandum for the Director, Detailed Analysis of the President's War Plan as Quoted in Newspaper and Compared with the Original, J. A. Cimperman and Duane L. Traynor, 4 December 1941, FBI 65-39935-17.

31. Wedemeyer, *Wedemeyer Reports!* 21; letter, Albert C. Wedemeyer to Walter Trohan, 27 November 1953, Wedemeyer Papers, Box 139, HIA.

third in command. Wedemeyer was understandably concerned. Years later, in 1957, he described the event and, while the passage of time had undoubtedly colored his memory, he conveyed his lasting bitterness: "When Edgar Hoover [*sic*], Thams [*sic*, Tamm], Genau and other FBI men descended upon me in my office, at that time in the Munitions Building, about December 1 [*sic*], 1941, I was confused, worried, and a little bit angry." He described the incident: "[FBI agents] descended upon me like vultures upon a prostrate antelope."<sup>32</sup>

Despite his vivid description of the FBI officials' visit, Wedemeyer described Tamm as "so courteous as to be disarming." The FBI assistant director asked whether Wedemeyer knew how the War Department's security protocols had been breached, and how he had ensured the security of the sensitive documents under his care. Wedemeyer characterized this first meeting with FBI officials as centering on evaluating his "sincerity and sense of responsibility." He conveyed his concern that he may have been careless at some point, but otherwise Wedemeyer claimed not to have any sense of guilt.<sup>33</sup>

At a subsequent interview, FBI agents asked how Wedemeyer disposed of the final copies of the Victory Program. At one point in the interview, he confused the dates as to when he gave Secretary Stimson his copy of the plan. That he confused the dates was a red flag to FBI agents. The confusion was not surprising, however, since the plan was completed on 10 September but not fully assembled (with the navy portion) and distributed until 25 September. Wedemeyer's confusion reveals no important inconsistency. To FBI officials, who regarded the anti-interventionist colonel as a prime suspect, however, this slip *was* significant. Suspecting that the Victory Program had been leaked during this September period, FBI agents concluded:

Colonel Wedemeyer was very ill at ease during this interview and several times fell back upon the old adage, "I could not remember," and seemed to be thinking up excuses for himself and his actions. . . . [A]s it was not until the middle of October, 1941, that Colonel [Richard] Scobey received instructions to finally assemble and produce the entire document, Colonel Wedemeyer becomes responsible for any leakage up to that date.<sup>34</sup>

32. Letter, Albert C. Wedemeyer to Burton K. Wheeler, 22 August 1957, Wedemeyer Papers, Box 139, HIA; letter, Albert C. Wedemeyer to Chesly Manly, 22 August 1957, Wedemeyer Papers, Box 139, HIA. Hoover did not attend.

33. Wedemeyer, *Wedemeyer Reports!* 22–23.

34. Report, by Joseph A. Genau, 15 January 1942, FBI 65–39945–3, pp. 28–30.



In another interview FBI agent Joseph Genau questioned Wedemeyer about his time in Germany. Genau asked Wedemeyer who in Germany he had befriended, particularly those in high-ranking military circles. He then asked whether the colonel had maintained a correspondence with any of these German friends. Wedemeyer replied that when the war began, his German correspondence had dwindled. The FBI agent also inquired whether Wedemeyer had attended any Nazi party meetings between 1936 and 1938. Wedemeyer answered in the negative, conceding, however, that had he been given the opportunity he would have attended out of “curiosity” to observe firsthand the “mass psychosis and unusual spectacle.”<sup>35</sup>

Agent Genau then turned his questioning to Wedemeyer’s contacts with the anti-interventionist movement. He asked: “Do you have any contacts with a person or persons within the America First Organization [*sic*]?” “Yes,” Wedemeyer responded, “I have several friends connected with that organization: Mrs. [Robert] Taft, John T. Flynn, Senator Wheeler, and Colonel Lindbergh. I haven’t seen them for some time because I’ve been too busy.” When asked if he sympathized with the efforts of the America First Committee, Wedemeyer responded: “In many ways, yes.” To FBI officials these ties were a significant investigative lead since Hoover’s FBI had an interest in and history of providing political intelligence on such prominent policy critics and, if linked to them, Wedemeyer must be suspect.<sup>36</sup>

This answer prompted further questions about Wedemeyer’s connections with the America First Committee. Genau was particularly interested in Wedemeyer’s connections to Charles Lindbergh. Responding to a series of questions, Wedemeyer admitted to having first met Lindbergh in Germany during his tour there in 1938 and then to having met with Lindbergh “occasionally” in the United States. Genau was also interested in Wedemeyer’s statement that “I respect him and agree with many of his ideas concerning our entrance into the war.” Genau thereupon inquired as to when he had met with Lindbergh in America, the most recent meeting only having been, Wedemeyer said, one month past. Wedemeyer added further that his visits were purely social and they only discussed national and international politics. Nevertheless, to FBI officials Wedemeyer’s link with Lindbergh—the most popular and influential of Roosevelt’s critics—only served to cast further suspicions on the colonel.<sup>37</sup>

35. Wedemeyer, *Wedemeyer Reports!* 32–33.

36. *Ibid.*, 34–35.

37. Wedemeyer, *Wedemeyer Reports!* 40–41.



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On 6 December, a day after he briefed the attorney general on the Victory Program investigation for the cabinet meeting, Hoover submitted to Biddle a preliminary report. Hoover advised that because of the way in which War Department documents were handled, "it is impossible to accurately and exactly" determine who had leaked the Victory Program. Despite this conclusion, Hoover ordered agents to continue to dig deeper to identify the perpetrator, and he proposed two courses of action for Biddle. First, Hoover suggested convening a grand jury before which, and under oath, the suspects would be interrogated. The drawback to this course, Hoover reported, was that it might shed some unfavorable light upon the Roosevelt administration. Hoover's second recommendation, and the one he personally advocated due to the sensitivity of the matter, was "to de-emphasize the inquiry which is being carried on concerning this matter, and to have it appear that the inquiry is in a quiescent status." This, Hoover counseled, would enable FBI agents to locate the "officer or person" who had leaked the plan. Biddle, apparently, accepted Hoover's second option, but the first was considered at a later date.<sup>38</sup>

Though unable to specifically identify the leaker, Hoover advised Biddle that "thoroughly reliable confidential informants" indicated that a high-ranking general staff officer of the War Department had leaked the plan "to an isolationist Senator." As for who had leaked the document, Hoover noted that some members of the War Department "were not at all in sympathy with the Administration's apparent plans or preparations for war." Moreover, these officers indicated their insubordination by referring to their superiors as "boneheads" while holding little respect for their abilities. Another informant, who was "closely associated with certain aspects of the publication of this story," informed FBI agents that the anti-interventionist press had hoped the leak would spark an "insurrection" in the War Department that would amount to a scandal "of greater proportion than the Dreyfus case."<sup>39</sup>

"There was ample evidence to suggest my guilt," Albert Wedemeyer wrote to newspaperman Walter Trohan in 1953.<sup>40</sup> On a *prima facie* level,

38. Personal and strictly confidential memorandum, Hoover to Biddle, 6 December 1941, FBI 65-39945-19.

39. Strictly personal and confidential blind memorandum, 5 December 1941, FBI 65-39945-19.

40. Letter, Albert C. Wedemeyer to Walter Trohan, 27 November 1953, Wedemeyer Papers, Box 139, HIA.

that a disgruntled “isolationist” within the War Department had leaked the Victory Program pointed directly to Wedemeyer. But this suspicion could not be proved, as one FBI agent reported:

The facts and circumstances surrounding the preparation and handling of this report in the period between the date the president requested it on July 9th and the time it was actually submitted to him on September 25th, and the comparatively wide distribution of 35 mimeographed copies of the report subsequent to its distribution by the Secretary of the Joint Planning Board, make it impossible to establish any evidence or manifestation of guilty conduct on the part of this officer [Wedemeyer] at this time.<sup>41</sup>

Wedemeyer, nevertheless, remained under suspicion. First, Wedemeyer remained a suspect because of the time he had spent at the *Kriegsakademie* between 1936 and 1938. While not sufficient to cast doubt on his loyalty to the United States, information purporting that he was “most pro-German in his feelings, his utterances, and his sympathies” along with his connections to Charles Lindbergh did, in fact, lead FBI officials to suspect his political motives. This was apparently confirmed to FBI officials when they learned Wedemeyer had hotly debated with fellow officers the issue of “his lack of sympathy with the administration’s international program.” Agents learned that Wedemeyer was “opposed to the Lend-Lease program” and that he was “very isolationist in his statements and sympathies.” Beyond his clear political biases, FBI officials took note as well of Wedemeyer’s access to the department’s plans to send troops to Iceland and its plan to occupy the Azores, both of which had been subject to leaks to the anti-interventionist press.<sup>42</sup>

Then the FBI’s special agent in charge in Detroit, John Bugas, provided further incriminating evidence that pointed, most likely, to Wedemeyer. A source in Detroit had overheard a conversation between Lindbergh, Henry Ford—the automobile magnate and fellow anti-interventionist—and his director of plant personnel and plant security, Harry Bennett. Lindbergh allegedly said that he had received “considerable information” from an officer in the army. This officer, whom Lindbergh had visited while in Washington, D.C., in addition to providing Lindbergh with military-related information, also shared the aviator’s political sympathies—like Wedemeyer.<sup>43</sup>

41. Strictly personal and confidential blind memorandum, 5 December 1941, FBI 65–39945–19, p. 4.

42. *Ibid.*, 4–5.

43. Memorandum, D. Milton Ladd to Edward A. Tamm, 9 December 1941, FBI 62–

FBI agents subsequently interviewed Bennett—who was probably their informant given the fact that agents had a history of contacting him—who explained that Ford had admonished Lindbergh for speaking on military matters since he was not an expert. Lindbergh then explained to Ford that he acquired his military information from high-ranking army officers. Bennett could not recall the name of this officer, who to FBI officials was likely be their leaker, and he also did not recall Lindbergh mentioning the Victory Program.<sup>44</sup>

Since Bennett could not produce the name of Lindbergh's army contact, FBI Assistant Director Tamm believed that Ford could. So he ordered the Detroit SAC to interview Ford but to do so in a nonconfrontational way. Delighted with the progress being made to ascertain who had leaked the Victory Program, Hoover instructed his subordinates to "press this" and "let me know [the] result."<sup>45</sup> Meanwhile, Hoover briefed the attorney general, advising that if Ford revealed Lindbergh's contact, "my idea is to have two of our best men see Lindberg [*sic*] and call upon him to give us the information he has" and, if he should refuse to reveal his information, to tell him that Ford had already identified the officer. Hoover then postulated that "we could then give consideration" to subpoenaing Lindbergh to testify before a grand jury where he could be forced to "either . . . put up or shut up." Biddle agreed, adding that the effort might permit the president to "clean out some 'brass hats'" from the War Department.<sup>46</sup>

Special Agent in Charge Bugas interviewed Ford, yet he did not know the name of Lindbergh's War Department contact. Hoover's scheme to locate the leak failed, but this did not deter Bugas, who interviewed Bennett again. Bennett said he would just ask Lindbergh who his contact was, but Bugas advised against such a blatant confrontation—probably fearing that Lindbergh would discover the FBI's interest—and, instead, Bennett identified another officer whom Lindbergh knew, Major James Higgs, who probably could identify Lindbergh's "principal contact."<sup>47</sup>

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19253–304.

44. Memorandum for Mr. Tamm, by D. Milton Ladd, 9 December 1941, FBI 62–19253–304.

45. Memorandum, Edward A. Tamm to J. Edgar Hoover, 11 December 1941, FBI 62–19253–304.

46. Memorandum, J. Edgar Hoover to Clyde Tolson, D. Milton Ladd, and Edward Tamm, 12 December 1941, FBI 65–11449–105. Lindbergh's name was commonly misspelled by many Americans.

47. Memorandum, Edward A. Tamm to J. Edgar Hoover, 13 December 1941, FBI 65–11449–113; personal and confidential letter, John S. Bugas to Edward A. Tamm, 13 December 1941, FBI 65–39945–14.

On 20 December 1941 Higgs was confronted by FBI Assistant Director Tamm and two MID officers. Higgs, a National Guard officer who worked as a public relations expert in General Henry “Hap” Arnold’s office, denied ever having seen the Victory Program, an assertion Tamm found curious because Higgs’s job was to publicize the Army Air Corps, which meant that he had to have access to military estimates. The major also claimed to know Lindbergh only formally, and not socially, which Tamm found to be inconsistent since Higgs had referred to Lindbergh several times by his nickname, Slim. Yet, irrespective of the lengthy interview and inconsistencies in Higgs’s remarks, Tamm failed to establish any leads on the Victory Program leak. He did find Higgs, however, to be heavily involved in War Department politics and “sculduggery [*sic*].”<sup>48</sup>

While FBI agents worked assiduously to confirm Wedemeyer (or someone else) as the leaker, they also attempted to identify which anti-interventionist senator had received the plans. FBI agents focused on two suspects: Senator Burton K. Wheeler of Montana and Senator David I. Walsh of Massachusetts. Wheeler was suspect almost immediately given his prominence as an anti-interventionist (and FBI subject) and because it was he who had publicized the military plan to send troops to Iceland.<sup>49</sup> Walsh became a suspect in January 1942 when an unnamed informant—a disaffected former employee of the *Washington Times-Herald*—had identified him as the recipient of one of the thirty-five mimeographed copies of the Victory Program and the one who allegedly had provided it to the *Chicago Tribune*. The informant, who was reportedly “tickled to death” to assist the FBI, believed that Walsh and Chesly Manly, the author of the controversial *Tribune* article, enjoyed a close relationship.<sup>50</sup>

Interestingly, FBI officials almost got it right in identifying the senator who was given the plan. They initially believed that Wheeler was their man but later focused on Walsh as their primary suspect, probably because of his connection in the contract fraud and homosexual cases. They were

48. Memorandum, Edward A. Tamm to J. Edgar Hoover, 27 December 1941, FBI 100–12691 [?]. The complete document number is unreadable; suffice it to say the memorandum is included in the file on the Victory Program leak: file 65–39945. Transcript of Higgs interview in report, by Joseph A. Genau, 15 January 1941, FBI 65–39945–3, pp. 35–48.

49. Confidential War Department memorandum, Grenville Clark to Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy, 4 December 1941, FBI 65–39945–26; memorandum, Assistant Director Louis Nichols to Robert E. Wick, 25 January 1952, FBI 65–39945–62.

50. Personal and confidential letter, Assistant Director P. E. Foxworth to J. Edgar Hoover, 20 January 1942, FBI 65–39945–35; memorandum, D. Milton Ladd to Edward A. Tamm, 21 January 1942, FBI 65–39945–[?]; personal and confidential letter, S. K. McKee to J. Edgar Hoover, 22 January 1942, FBI 100–3709–[?].

wrong. Senator Wheeler had, in fact, been the recipient of the plan and had provided it to Chesly Manly; Wheeler publicly admitted as much in 1962.

Wheeler's role in the Victory Program leak began on 8 June 1940, the day after he had delivered a nationally broadcast speech in which he urged Americans to remain calm in the face of events in Europe. According to Wheeler's account, a captain in the Army Air Corps then visited him in his Senate office and offered to provide the senator with official military figures while warning the senator that the American air forces were no match for Nazi Germany's. The officer further stated that anyone who claimed to the contrary was lying. Wheeler's relationship with this military source became intimate and long-lasting; the senator, moreover, took this man's name with him to his grave.<sup>51</sup>

About a year and a half after meeting this officer, he informed Wheeler that Roosevelt had ordered the creation of a master plan for an American expeditionary force to Europe. Fascinated by this claim, in September 1941 Wheeler asked if the captain could provide him with a copy. He agreed to the senator's request but was unable to secure a copy until 3 December. That day, he delivered the Victory Program "wrapped in brown paper" to Wheeler's home. Wheeler asked the captain why he agreed to leak this plan, to which he replied: "Congress is a branch of government. I think it had a right to know what's really going on in the executive branch when it concerns human lives." Wheeler kept the plan overnight to study it.<sup>52</sup>

"As I scanned its contents," Wheeler subsequently wrote, "my blood pressure rose." The senator believed that given the way in which Roosevelt had couched the Neutrality Acts, lend-lease, and the destroyers-for-bases deal as defensive measures meant to ensure American isolation from war, revealing the Victory Program would undercut those seemingly specious arguments. Wheeler wanted to prove to Americans that if the country continued on its present course that war was inevitable; and the Victory Program only underscored that premise. Additionally, Wheeler did not believe that revealing this top-secret plan was a violation of the law because it was only a contingency plan of production requirements and

51. Burton K. Wheeler with Paul F. Healy, *Yankee from the West* (New York: Doubleday, 1962), 21.

52. As quoted in Wheeler and Healy, *Yankee from the West*, 32. Wheeler suspected that a senior officer in the War Department had authorized the Victory Program's release to him. According to newspaperman Walter Trohan, Wheeler believed that Army Air Corps General Henry Arnold—who was sympathetic to the anti-interventionists—was at the center of the release. Albert Wedemeyer, however, strongly disagreed with Trohan's belief. See letter, Walter Trohan to Albert Wedemeyer, 25 November 1953, and letter, Albert Wedemeyer to Walter Trohan, 27 November 1953, Wedemeyer Papers, Box 139, HIA.

not an operational war plan. He saw no legitimate reason not to inform the public.<sup>53</sup>

Wheeler decided that the best way to make public the Victory Program was to ensure its publication in a paper sympathetic to the anti-interventionist cause. He therefore decided to share it with Chesly Manly, the *Chicago Tribune's* Washington correspondent, because "I liked Manly and knew his paper would give the plan the kind of attention it deserved." When presented with the document that night, according to Wheeler, Manly was "startled and fascinated." The two men scanned the Victory Program at Wheeler's house "for several hours" during which time Manly took copious notes. The document was returned to the War Department in the morning, and on 4 December the plan went public.<sup>54</sup>

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Having failed in their initial efforts to identify the leaker of the Victory Program and to firmly establish which anti-interventionist senator had received it, FBI officials increased pressure on specific individuals. In early 1942, FBI agents and MID officers extensively interviewed the author of the *Tribune* article, Chesly Manly. They had hoped their questioning would reveal his source as well as further details surrounding the leak. The FBI and MID interrogators continually pressed Manly to identify his source using the classic interrogation tactic of constantly rephrasing the same questions. But Manly, undaunted by his adversaries, stuck to the same answer: "I am not at liberty to answer any question that goes to the source of my information." FBI agent Joseph Genau, the bureau's lead investigator, pressured Manly by asking him if his source was "above patriotism?" The journalist denied the matter had anything to do with patriotism. Changing tactics, the interrogators asked Manly which numbered copy of the Victory Program he had seen. Knowing that copies of the plan were charged out to specific individuals, Manly refused to answer. FBI agents were also not above employing hyperbole in their questioning:

There is . . . a deadly earnestness to get to the bottom of this and we are trying to clear you and your paper of this espionage. It is definitely, until you prove to the contrary, a possible case of espionage. I can tell you this, that if it ever got out to the public—even a rumor—that there were copies

53. Wheeler and Healy, *Yankee from the West*, 32–33.

54. As quoted in Wheeler and Healy, *Yankee from the West*, 33.

of the document you had several week prior to Pearl Harbor, they [the public] would tear down that building in Chicago, and you know it. That's just the type of hysteria we don't want in this case.<sup>55</sup>

Despite the agent's suggestion that the onus was on Manly to prove his own innocence, he assured the agent that no espionage had taken place. Secretary of War Stimson was briefed on the interview and was told that Manly had obfuscated during questioning. Stimson then confided to his diary, accurately determining on his own who Manly's likely source was, that "it looks as if my old friend Wheeler was pretty close to trouble."<sup>56</sup>

In order to handle such a large investigation, FBI officials relied upon military intelligence officers to interview the publisher of the *New York Daily News*, Joseph Patterson. Patterson was not as cautious in his answers as Manly had been and so revealed that "[a] Senator called [telephoned] Mr. [Arthur] Henning, manager of the Washington Office of the Chicago Tribune . . . and through this medium had Mr. Henning this story." Unable to identify the senator, Patterson informed investigators that McCormick had standing orders to find any story that could be used to scoop the *Chicago Sun*, the rival newspaper slated to make its debut on 4 December 1941.<sup>57</sup>

With this lead, the FBI and MID investigators located and questioned Arthur Henning in Washington, D.C. Henning refused to identify the source of the leak, but commented about scooping the *Sun*: "This thing just happened. It was a providential occurrence. . . . I received no instructions from my superiors." Henning also admitted to having seen a copy of the Victory Program, but added that his source "had a legal right to have the plan in his possession." When asked whether this source was on Capitol Hill, Henning reiterated: "These things may be dismissed from your mind."<sup>58</sup>

FBI investigators found Henning's attitude and information of seeming importance. Following it, FBI agents interviewed McCormick and received from him a promise to ask Henning to assist the bureau without violating the confidentiality of newspaper sources. Then FBI agents reinterviewed Henning, prefacing their effort with a question as to whether Henning had spoken to McCormick. Though answering in the affirmative, Henning

55. Personal and confidential letter, S. K. McKee to J. Edgar Hoover, FBI 65-39945-1; statement of Chesly Manly, 23 January 1942, FBI 65-39945-1.

56. Entry for 24 February 1942, Stimson Diaries, 37:155 (microfilm ed., reel 7).

57. Report, by Joseph A. Genau, 15 January 1942, FBI 65-39945-3, pp. 33-34.

58. Report, by Joseph A. Genau, 15 January 1942, FBI 65-39945-3, pp. 50-52.



refused to divulge any further information, commenting only that “[t]he individual who had it got it legally and properly. I must protect my source and will not give my source away if I can possibly help it.”<sup>59</sup>

Yet again, FBI agents’ efforts got them nowhere. FBI Assistant Director Tamm then advised Hoover that the bureau should drop the “kid gloves” and subpoena Henning, McCormick, and Manly before a federal grand jury to force them to reveal their source “or be cited for perjury or misconduct.” The FBI director agreed. “We have ourselves largely to blame,” he commented, “because of unaggressive handling of [this] case by our own people.” Despite the fact that the FBI’s investigative strategy was devised by Hoover, he nevertheless blamed FBI agents’ work for its failure.<sup>60</sup>

Hoover then changed his strategy. When advising the attorney general on 27 January 1942, the FBI director noted that hundreds of people had been interviewed, but because the record of War Department document handling was imprecise it was “impossible” to identify the leaker. Hoover pointed out that at least 109 people had access to the Victory Program in both the War and Navy Departments, but because these people regularly shared documents without charging them out the real number “is legion.”<sup>61</sup>

In recapitulating the case for Biddle, Hoover disclosed that a popular rumor suggested Missouri congressman Philip Bennett had paid a War Department clerk for the plan, but FBI agents could not corroborate this. Regarding Charles Lindbergh, Hoover noted that the bureau’s “extensive investigation” had failed to link Lindbergh through “personal friends or contacts” to the leak. Finally, those War Department officers who were “anti-British, anti-Administration, or otherwise out of sympathy with the Administration’s international policies” had also not been linked to the Victory Program leak.<sup>62</sup>

Because his efforts had failed to uncover the source of the leak, Hoover informed Biddle that the FBI would discontinue further investigation. He recommended, instead, that the administration consider the other, potentially embarrassing, investigative strategy Hoover had outlined immediately after the leak: convening of a grand jury. The FBI director then singled out Henning and Manly as the two most important witnesses to subpoena

59. *Ibid.*, pp. 52–57.

60. Memorandum, Edward A. Tamm to J. Edgar Hoover, 14 January 1942, FBI 65–39945–4.

61. Personal and confidential memorandum, J. Edgar Hoover to attorney general, 27 January 1942, FBI 65–39945–26; blind memorandum, 27 January 1942, FBI 65–39945–26X.

62. Blind memorandum, 27 January 1942, FBI 65–39945–26X, p. 4.



while arguing that their source was undoubtedly “a Congressional one.” If Henning and Manly revealed which senator had obtained the plan, Hoover wrote, then an attempt could be made “to compel” the senator, before the grand jury, to name his War Department source.<sup>63</sup>

While Hoover told Biddle that the FBI would stop its investigation, in reality it did not. FBI agents followed up any lead they discovered after 27 January and continued to interview numerous individuals. In the meantime, the Roosevelt administration dragged its heels in deciding how to dispose of the case because in the days just after Pearl Harbor, with no firm suspects at hand, there were more pressing issues to address—such as what to do with Japanese Americans on the West Coast.

While the FBI’s investigation was, for all intents and purposes, stalled, the matter was still one of concern on Capitol Hill. On 13 February 1942, after a discussion with Senator Nye, Tamm warned Hoover that there was a great deal of suspicion among senators about what the FBI was doing. Anti-interventionist senators, moreover, believed that the FBI was specifically targeting them as leak suspects. Chesly Manly was even reported to have told Senator Wheeler that if the FBI continued to target anti-interventionist senators, he would “expose the entire thing.” How Hoover and other senior FBI officials responded to this information remains unknown because of redactions in FBI documents, but it is clear that the FBI’s investigation never went public and the FBI never identified the leaker or his senatorial companion.<sup>64</sup>

For the next two months (February and March) FBI agents continued to write up investigative summaries and conduct interviews. They seemingly explored every possible avenue available to them until the administration made a final decision as to whether the grand jury would be employed against those involved in the leak. Agents interviewed in particular the thirty-two military and civilian employees in the office of the secretary of war, including Henry Stimson’s personal secretary. None of the subjects could reveal any useful information to interrogators.<sup>65</sup>

63. Blind memorandum, 27 January 1942, FBI 65-39945-26X, p. 6. This was not the first time that Hoover suggested employing grand juries against Roosevelt’s anti-interventionist foreign policy critics. He advocated use of a grand jury when, for example, Charles Lindbergh seemed to be a promising lead in the case.

64. Memorandum, D. Milton Ladd to J. Edgar Hoover, 13 February 1942, FBI 65-39945-32. Wheeler has written that he did not believe the FBI had investigated his role in the leak. Senator David Walsh, however, told the Montana senator that “he was tailed for several days.” See Wheeler and Healy, *Yankee from the West*, 36.

65. For these interviews see the 218-page confidential memorandum by Joseph A. Genau, 24 March 1942, FBI 100-3709.

By May, having received no direction from the Justice Department, Hoover inquired of Biddle what the administration's decision was as to the leak investigation. He relayed that all available information had been submitted to the department's criminal division, and asked if the case should be closed or left open. The attorney general, apparently, chose not to continue to pursue the matter and Hoover advised his subordinates that the "file may be closed."<sup>66</sup>

This did not, however, end the matter. By June the administration began to reconsider prosecuting those involved in the Victory Program leak. This decision did not stem out of some sudden reconsideration of the evidence or Hoover's proposed tactics. Instead, after the Battle of Midway in June 1942, because the *Chicago Tribune* had published a story revealing the strength of Japanese naval forces in the Pacific and because this information originated from government sources, the administration sought to indict the *Tribune* and the article's author, Stanley Johnson, for printing "seditious" material. Ultimately, however, because the government could not prove that damage had been done with publication of the story, the indictment never materialized. But it was the excitement generated from this particular story that renewed the government's consideration over taking action in the Victory Program leak.<sup>67</sup>

With a prosecutorial spirit reinvigorated amid the fast-moving events of 1942, Assistant Attorney General Wendell Berge requested an FBI summary of the case. In it, Hoover outlined the evidence and how, in his view, the Espionage Act could be used against those involved in the leak. Hoover suggested prosecuting Manly, Henning, and the management of both the *Chicago Tribune* and *Washington Times-Herald* under three sections of the law. One section criminalized the possession of an official national defense plan with the intent to disclose it to an unauthorized person. Manly and Henning were supposedly liable since they had, in Hoover's view, provided the Victory Program to the two newspapers; and the newspapers were liable inasmuch as they had made the Victory Program available to the general public. A second section criminalized the copying of defense plans

66. Personal and confidential memorandum, J. Edgar Hoover to attorney general, 2 May 1942, FBI 65-39945-41; letter, J. Edgar Hoover to Special Agent in Charge, Washington, DC, 11 May 1942, FBI 65-39945-40.

67. Memorandum, J. Edgar Hoover to William D. Mitchell, 17 June 1942, FBI 65-39945-42; memorandum, J. Edgar Hoover to attorney general, 17 June 1942, FBI 65-39945-47; memorandum, Wendell Berge to J. Edgar Hoover, 17 June 1942; memorandum, J. Edgar Hoover to Wendell Berge, 19 June 1942, FBI 65-39945-51; memorandum, J. Edgar Hoover to Wendell Berge, 31 July 1942, FBI 65-39945-55; Athan Theoharis, "The FBI, the Roosevelt Administration, and the 'Subversive' Press," *Journalism History* 19 (Spring 1993): 8.

with the intent to use the information to the detriment of the United States or to the advantage of a foreign power. Hoover believed the leak could be construed in a way to argue such a position. The third section made illegal the acquisition of a defense plan while knowing it was against the law. Hoover believed that the best witnesses for prosecuting the case would be Wedemeyer and fifteen others.<sup>68</sup>

While their reason was left unrecorded in available documents, Justice Department attorneys decided against pursuing the case. With the tide of war shifting dramatically by the middle of 1942, and with more urgent war-related matters occupying the White House, interest in the case seemed to have dissipated. Nevertheless, FBI efforts to discover the source of the leak and, if possible, develop evidence against them for prosecution were prodigious if a failure. More important, however, was the reason Hoover so urgently pursued the matter: senior Roosevelt administration officials sought retribution for the embarrassing revelation and they wanted Roosevelt's foreign policy opposition to pay.

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One claim concerning BSC activity and the anti-interventionists that is bogus involved the leak of the Victory Program to the *Chicago Tribune* and *Washington Times-Herald*. Not mentioned in the official BSC history, the account of the BSC's role in the Victory Program leak appeared in the journalist William Stevenson's sensational book about the BSC head, *A Man Called Intrepid* (1976). Stevenson wrote that Senator Wheeler was, indeed, the person who had offered the Victory Program to the anti-interventionist press, believing it to be the smoking-gun evidence that Roosevelt intended to lead America to war. Yet, Stevenson also claimed, the Victory Program was, in reality, part of a ruse concocted by the BSC's Political Warfare Division to provide Nazi Germany with a "fantastic coup." The Victory Program, according to Stevenson, was pieced together "out of material already known to have reached the enemy in dribs and drabs, and . . . some misleading information."<sup>69</sup>

68. Memorandum, D. Milton Ladd to J. Edgar Hoover, 15 June 1942, FBI 65-39945-43; memorandum re news article in *Chicago Tribune* and *Washington Times-Herald*, author unknown, 15 June 1942, FBI 65-39945-4[?]; memorandum, L. L. Tyler to D. Milton Ladd, 17 June 1942, FBI 65-39945-50; blind memorandum re Pertinent Articles in *Chicago Tribune*, 17 June 1942, FBI 65-39945-50.

69. William Stevenson, *A Man Called Intrepid: The Secret War* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 298.

With the United States on the verge of war with Japan and Germany (via the undeclared war in the Atlantic) in late November 1941, BSC allegedly slipped the phony Victory Program to Wheeler through a young military officer. The BSC's goal was to have Wheeler publicize the plan and thereby goad Hitler into declaring war on the United States. The faked Victory Program was to stand as evidence, once published in the press, of Roosevelt's intention to wage war on Nazi Germany. And, according to Stevenson, it was successful in prompting Hitler to declare war on the United States on 11 December 1941, four days after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.<sup>70</sup>

This account of the BSC's role in creating and slipping the Victory Program to the unwitting Wheeler who, in turn, had it published, thereby leading the United States to war with Germany, is erroneous. As the preceding FBI investigation demonstrates, the Victory Program was a genuine contingency plan drawn up under Wedemeyer's supervision. But the story is illustrative of the persistence of the mythology surrounding British intelligence and its activities in the United States, a mythology that is difficult to repress because of continued (sixty-year-old) government restriction of access to records on both sides of the Atlantic.

But some continue to press the notion that the Victory Program was intended to incite Hitler into declaring war on the United States. Thomas Fleming, in his book *The New Dealers' War: Franklin D. Roosevelt and the War within World War II* (2001), accepts that the Victory Program was genuine, yet he believes that Roosevelt intentionally leaked the Victory Program to Wheeler. Roosevelt, sensing imminent war with Japan, sought to goad Hitler into declaring war to achieve the realization of his Europe-first policy of war. Conceding that "there is no absolute proof" to support his claim, Fleming nevertheless believes the charge "fits the devious side of Franklin Roosevelt's complex personality." Fleming offers no verifiable evidence whatsoever to support his case.<sup>71</sup>



The Victory Program leak and subsequent FBI investigation, therefore, are best understood in the context of Hoover's long effort to cater to the Roosevelt administration's political interests rather than as a conspiratorial

70. Stevenson, *A Man Called Intrepid*, 299–300.

71. Thomas Fleming, *The New Dealers' War: Franklin D. Roosevelt and the War within World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 1–48. See also Fleming's article "The Big Leak," *American Heritage* 38 (December 1987): 65–71.

plan to goad Nazi Germany to declare war on the United States or a fabrication of British intelligence to bring the United States into war, or even as an act of treachery. The Victory Program leak was not the national security breach that some claimed; instead, as a contingency plan only, its revelation was an embarrassment that fanned the flames of Roosevelt's anti-interventionist opposition. The very nature of the FBI's investigation confirms as much, since they focused on "isolationists" as targets and regarded their motives as being rooted not in treason, but in having no sympathy for Roosevelt's foreign policy. This is characteristic of the domestic security state, and later Cold War, whereby foreign policy critics were targeted for investigation and retribution because they opposed official government policy or held radical beliefs. And such monitoring did not end with Pearl Harbor and America's involvement in the Second World War because foreign policy critics continued to fall under FBI scrutiny.

## Blossoming of the Domestic Security State

*November 1941 to March 1942*

By the end of 1941 the debate between interventionists and anti-interventionists had settled into stalemate. While the Roosevelt administration had won passage of many measures to assist the beleaguered Allies, yet still avoid direct participation in war, it could not break the deadlock between two rival and passionate foreign policy advocates and their positions. The Victory Program leak appeared to be an event the administration could use to break the deadlock and finally discredit the anti-interventionists as conspirators who illegally gained access to secret government records and published them, but FBI Director Hoover was unable to find the leaker. For anti-interventionists, on the other hand, the leak only confirmed their worst suspicions about Roosevelt and they hoped to triumph with it.

This stalemate, however, in no way daunted the obsequious FBI director. By the dawn of 1942 FBI agents developed three cases that proved valuable in Hoover's effort to service White House political interests and to promote the view of legitimate critics as subversive, exemplifying the evolution of the domestic security state. Each case reveals, in part, Hoover's bureaucratic motives vis-à-vis the Roosevelt administration and his questionable investigative tactics where agents consistently ignored citizens' civil liberties. FBI agents, in the first case, developed a fruitful—if illegal—source of political intelligence on anti-interventionist political activity and some of this information made its way into FBI reports shared with the White House where, in at least one instance, it was used in an attempt to discredit an administration opponent. In the second case, FBI officials sought to develop information to warrant a sedition case against one prominent, outspoken, and otherwise legitimate Roosevelt critic. And in the third, FBI agents used illegal techniques—without their superiors'

permission—and developed intelligence that saw the conviction of a naive and atypical anti-interventionist whose case reflected FBI officials' curious view of legitimate foreign policy critics as subversives. Moreover, all three examples illustrate that the domestic security state was still evolving by the dawn of 1942, during a period of crisis, while the Roosevelt administration either averted its gaze or remained ignorant as to exactly what the FBI was engaged in.

What is particularly striking about the three FBI targets to be analyzed here, however, is that their cases preceded, and were a clear step toward, the much more publicized Great Sedition Trial which serves as a marker for the peak of the domestic security state. The trial involved thirty alleged fascists who in January 1944 were charged with a “plot to incite mutiny in the armed forces, unseat the Government and set up a Nazi regime.” In other words, they were charged with violating the Smith Act—advocating the violent overthrow of the U.S. government. Among these thirty were the now infamous but, at the time, relatively obscure figures of Lawrence Dennis, Gerald Winrod, William Dudley Pelley, Elizabeth Dilling, Joseph McWilliams, and George Sylvester Viereck.<sup>1</sup> Roosevelt had pressed his attorney general, Francis Biddle, by 1944 to indict these right-wing figures—who sat on the periphery of American politics—for sedition. In his 1975 book, *Prophets on the Right*, Ronald Radosh rightly compared the trial of Dennis and company to those trials against alleged communists in the 1950s.<sup>2</sup> What the trial illustrated, however, was the well-established domestic security state—the forerunner to the later national security state—already in operation in 1944. What elucidates this so-called first Dennis Case, moreover, is that which preceded it; namely, the FBI's investigative efforts against the Brigham family of New York, the revisionist historian Harry Elmer Barnes, and the aviator Laura Ingalls. The FBI's efforts, failures, and successes in these three cases illustrate that evolutionary process leading to the Great Sedition Trial which created the basis on which the National Security State formed.



The first of these particular FBI targets was Ethel Brigham and her family

1. “U.S. Indicts 30, Alleging Nazi Plot to Incite Mutiny and Revolution,” *New York Times*, 4 January 1944.

2. Ronald Radosh, *Prophets on the Right: Profiles of Conservative Critics of American Globalism* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975), 291.

of New York City. The FBI's investigation of Ethel—a vocal ultraconservative—and her family proved to be a windfall for Hoover's interest in the political activities of the anti-interventionists and in his effort to present them as subversive. The principal means by which FBI agents collected this political intelligence was a wiretap of Ethel's telephone. Politically, Ethel and her daughter, Barbara, identified with anti-interventionism and were intimately associated with the Greenwich Village branch of the America First Committee's New York chapter. Barbara, in fact, served as this branch's chairperson.

Not fringe figures, the Brighams were a prominent family, which situated them perfectly among other foreign policy critics whom FBI agents monitored. Ethel was a leading opera and concert soprano during the 1920s and 1930s who performed in London, Berlin, and New York. Barbara was an important America First figure in the Greenwich chapter, while her brother, Daniel, was a foreign correspondent for the *New York Times*, based in Switzerland; their teenage sister, Constance, was an aspiring actress who performed on Broadway. The FBI's monitoring of this prominent New York family's politics corresponds to its broader pattern of monitoring Roosevelt's other prominent foreign policy critics for political purposes. But, significantly, since the Brighams were not national figures, FBI agents could more intrusively gather intelligence from them with less of a chance of exposure.<sup>3</sup>

The catalyst that brought the Brighams to the attention of FBI officials was not their politics but a rumor about them relayed to the vice president of the United States, Henry Wallace, on 3 November 1941. Wallace's unnamed confidant claimed to have information relating to an alleged assassination plot against President Roosevelt that was linked to the America First Committee. This person had been introduced to the Brighams in Washington, D.C., and subsequently visited Ethel and Barbara in New York, where, after an evening at the cinema, Ethel became enraged over a news report that Roosevelt had placed the Coast Guard under navy authority. Since Ethel's nephew was a Coast Guard reservist, and was now seemingly in danger of seeing combat in the Atlantic, she exclaimed that Roosevelt "ought to be killed for taking such action" and that "he would be killed before long." Subsequently, the informant learned that the Brighams

3. See Ethel Brigham's obituary in *New York Times*, 28 September 1968, 33. On the New York chapter of America First see Michele Flynn Stenehjem, *An American First: John T. Flynn and the America First Committee* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1976). For Daniel's work see, for example, his page one story: Daniel Brigham, "Pope Has Long Talk with Taylor; Move to Aid Jews in France Seen," *New York Times*, 20 September 1942.



allegedly were associated with an organization dubbed the One Gun Club that was said to have five hundred thousand members and planned a revolt if the United States entered the war.<sup>4</sup>

Upon receipt of this information, an FBI official placed the Brighams on “loose surveillance” which was to “be handled very discreetly.” Hoover then notified the Secret Service, whose responsibility it was to protect the president and investigate threats made to his life. Irrespective of the Secret Service’s jurisdiction, on 4 November 1941 Hoover obtained from Attorney General Biddle authorization to wiretap the Brighams’ telephone. This was an unlawful action. Since the enacting of the 1934 Federal Communications Act, the use of wiretaps by anyone was illegal. In 1940, however, given the sense of crisis after the Nazi invasion of western Europe, Roosevelt had secretly authorized the limited use of wiretaps in national defense cases so long as the attorney general approved of them. Biddle acceded to Hoover’s request and, on 10 November 1941, FBI agents installed a wiretap.<sup>5</sup>

While the wiretap was FBI officials’ most valuable source of information regarding the Brighams, it was not their only source. To better establish “the identity and activities of” the family, FBI agents contacted the Credit Bureau of Greater New York, the Automobile Registration Bureau, and the Brighams’ mail carrier. In so doing, agents learned that both Ethel and Barbara worked for the local America First Committee chapter, which led them to include that chapter under their umbrella of surveillance. Finally, on 13 November 1941, agents established a mail cover—a surveillance method of recording the names and addresses of senders and recipients of mail—on the Brigham household, but it ultimately proved to be unproductive.<sup>6</sup>

4. Confidential report, SAC P. E. Foxworth, New York City, 15 January 1942, FBI 100-50729-19; personal and confidential memorandum, Hoover to attorney general, 3 November 1941, FBI 100-50729-1; memorandum, Edward A. Tamm to D. Milton Ladd, 3 November 1941, FBI 100-50729-2; memorandum, Tamm to Hoover, 3 November 1941, FBI 100-50729-3.

5. Memorandum, Kramer to Ladd, 4 November 1941, FBI 100-50729-4; letter, Hoover to Frank Wilson, Chief of Secret Service, 4 November 1941, FBI 100-50729-4; letter, Wilson to Hoover, 5 November 1941, FBI 100-50729-5; memorandum, Hoover to attorney general, 4 November 1941, FBI 100-50729-4 (there is a notation in Brigham’s FBI file that Hoover’s 4 November memo to the attorney general authorizing the wiretap had been removed permanently to the National Security Electronic Surveillance File in 1973); memorandum, Ladd to Hoover, 5 January 1942, FBI 100-50729-17.

6. Confidential report, SAC P. E. Foxworth, New York City, 15 January 1942, FBI 100-50729-19.

After Secret Service agents interviewed Ethel Brigham about her alleged assassination threat, a threat the agents found not to be innocuous, Hoover advised Biddle that “the possibility of obtaining additional information, either through the technical surveillance [wiretap] or [informant] is extremely doubtful.” Hoover nevertheless advised his superior that FBI agents would continue to develop information “as opportunity presented.” Despite Hoover’s doubt as to the efficacy of the wiretap, it remained in place for another month. It is not clear whether Biddle was aware that the wiretap was continued, but Hoover’s language seemed to suggest that it would not be.<sup>7</sup>

What is clear, however, is that in the nine communications and one summarizing report from New York SAC Foxworth to Hoover concerning the fruits of the Brigham wiretap, all the reported information concerned not criminal activity but the political activity of the family and other prominent anti-interventionists. In his reports to Hoover, SAC Foxworth never explicitly mentioned the wiretap. Instead, as was common FBI practice, he employed the euphemism “from a confidential source that is known to the Bureau” in place of “wiretap” or “electronic surveillance.” By using word substitutions, Foxworth was able to conceal the FBI’s use of an illegal investigative tool, even if the president had secretly authorized its limited use with the attorney general’s assent. If the FBI report was somehow compromised, a reader not familiar with FBI parlance would assume the document referred not to a wiretap but a human source of information.

The real value of the Brigham wiretap to FBI officials is evident with the first report Foxworth sent to Hoover. In a personal and confidential letter<sup>8</sup> to Hoover dated 18 November 1941, Foxworth noted that no further information had been developed regarding any assassination plot or other illegal activities, but he did report bountiful political intelligence. This included the New York America First chapter’s decision not to join the right-wing group Women United in burning Roosevelt’s campaign pledges in protest because of the negative publicity it would engender, and Brigham’s discussion of the chapter’s plan to lobby congressmen to vote against revision of the Neutrality Act (arming of merchant ships).<sup>9</sup>

7. Personal and confidential memorandum, Hoover to attorney general, 15 November 1941, FBI 100–50729–7; memorandum, Ladd to Hoover, 5 January 1942, FBI 100–50729–17.

8. FBI policy required letters to Hoover marked “personal and confidential” to be directed immediately to his desk and not directly into the bureau’s central records system. See Athan Theoharis, ed., *From the Secret Files of J. Edgar Hoover* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1991), 2–4.

9. Personal and confidential letter, Foxworth to Hoover, 18 November 1941, FBI 100–

All subsequent reports to Hoover contained further and more compelling political intelligence, such as Brigham's comment that America First might evolve into a political party (the American party), that Brigham had made a number of anti-Semitic remarks, that she had said "das ist gut" on the telephone while speaking to someone with a German accent, and that the AFC was linked to congressmen who would ensure that there would be no vote on war. Brigham also claimed to know a man who saw the president biweekly and suggested that he could be used to deliver messages to the White House. Other reports related Brigham's negative opinion of Roosevelt, her desire to "Whoop it up" if Roosevelt's sons were sent to war, and her fitful remark after Pearl Harbor: "Where is that One-Gun Club that's going to do something?"<sup>10</sup>

FBI agents were even able to use information gleaned from the wiretap in December 1941 to cultivate an informant. The incident stemmed from a heated political discussion Ethel Brigham had with a houseguest who apparently did not agree with her politics. FBI agents recorded Ethel's incendiary comment over the telephone that "what's bothering me now is what that little bitch will do to me, but I swear by all that is holy that if she does try anything I will call up the wives of the men she has been having in her room." Foxworth made arrangements to interview this woman (whose identity is redacted in FBI documents) who then became an FBI informer. She provided Foxworth with a long list of the Brighams' friends and acquaintances, a list that Hoover found valuable.<sup>11</sup>

In late December, Foxworth reported to Hoover the last information to be developed from the wiretap during 1941. It concerned two prominent America First figures: Laura Ingalls (to be discussed below) and Charles Lindbergh. Barbara Brigham discussed with New York attorney Emil Morosini—whom FBI officials believed to be subversive—Ingalls's arrest for not registering as a foreign agent and the possibility of America First

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50729-6. On Women United and other right-wing women's groups see Glen Jeansonne, *Women of the Far Right: The Mothers Movement and World War II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

10. Personal and confidential letter, Foxworth to Hoover, 25 November 1941, FBI 100-50729-8; FBI teletype, Foxworth to Hoover, 25 November 1941, FBI 100-50729-10; Special delivery air-mail letter, Hoover to SAC New York, 2 December 1941, FBI 100-50729-10; personal and confidential letter, Foxworth to Hoover, 3 December 1941, FBI 100-50729-9; personal and confidential letter, Foxworth to Hoover, 13 December 1941, FBI 100-50729-11; personal and confidential letter, Foxworth to Hoover, 16 December 1941, FBI 100-50729-14.

11. Personal and confidential letter, Foxworth to Hoover, 13 December 1941, FBI 100-50729-12.

raising her \$7,500 bail when Barbara expressed concern over Ingalls's arrest being "a slap" for the committee. Brigham also discussed, significantly, a dinner party she attended with Lindbergh on 17 December 1941 hosted by the secretary of the AFC's New York chapter, Edwin S. Webster. In a telephone conversation, Brigham said that Lindbergh had referred to the Japanese as a "Yellow peril" and had urged America First to rally behind the war effort after Pearl Harbor, yet "seemed discouraged as the govt has no plan nor does it know for what it is fighting."<sup>12</sup>

This particular political intelligence concerning Charles Lindbergh, gleaned illegally from a wiretap, made its way to the White House and was then used by Interior Secretary Harold Ickes—one of Lindbergh's fiercest critics. (It should be noted that Ickes would not have known the information had originated from an illegal surveillance method.) Ickes kept an indexed file of all of Lindbergh's speeches and writings because he believed him to be "a ruthless and conscious fascist, motivated by hatred for you [Roosevelt] personally and a contempt for democracy in general."<sup>13</sup> Yet beyond his index, Ickes had access to FBI political intelligence that he received either directly from Hoover or from Roosevelt. In October 1941, for example, Hoover provided the interior secretary with a blind memorandum summarizing all FBI information on Guy Junemann, an associate of Joseph McWilliams who, in turn, had ties to Hamilton Fish and the America First Committee. In another example, during 1943 Hoover had used the fingerprint resources of the FBI to help Ickes determine if a man named Abraham Jones was stealing chicken eggs from his farm. But it was the Lindbergh information that Ickes had found tantalizing and, indeed, used.<sup>14</sup>

In December 1941, Ickes wrote a scathing book about Charles Lindbergh and made arrangements to publish it with Vanguard Press. Tentatively titled *The Strange Case of Mr. Lindbergh or Charles A. Lindbergh: A Failure in Americanization*, Ickes claimed "to trace, factually and objectively, this young man's fatal course." Probably because the anti-interventionists had

12. FBI teletype, Foxworth to Hoover, 19 December 1941, FBI 100-50729-13; FBI teletype, Foxworth to Hoover 20 December 1941, FBI 100-50729-16.

13. Letter, Harold Ickes to Franklin D. Roosevelt, 30 December 1941, President's Secretary's File, Justice Department, FDRL. Roosevelt agreed "wholeheartedly" with Ickes's assessment of Lindbergh. See letter, Roosevelt to Ickes, 30 December 1941, President's Secretary's File, Justice Department, FDRL.

14. Personal and confidential letter, J. Edgar Hoover to Harold Ickes, 31 October 1941; and blind memorandum re: Guy Junemann, 27 October 1941; and personal and confidential letter, Hoover to Ickes, 17 October 1943, all in Justice Department folder, Harold Ickes Papers, Box 205, Library of Congress (hereafter LOC), Washington, DC.

rallied behind the war effort following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, and despite having won a contract for the book, it was never published. Needless to say, the manuscript confirms that at least one senior administration official used some FBI political intelligence (that was obtained illegally) in an effort to discredit Roosevelt's critics.<sup>15</sup>

The information Ickes used originated with the Brigham wiretap and appeared late in the manuscript. Ickes wrote about the dinner party Edwin Webster hosted at which both Brigham and Lindbergh were present. Citing a *New York Mirror* story that recounted the event, Ickes noted that Lindbergh blamed Great Britain for the outbreak of war and argued that America First should wait until the Pearl Harbor excitement died down before attacking further Roosevelt's policies. Ickes also claimed to have "from a private source" other revealing information. He wrote:

The party was held in the home of Edwin S. Webster, secretary of the New York Chapter of the America First Committee on December 17, and 50 people were present. Lindbergh addressed the gathering. He told them that the real danger was not Hitler but the Yellow Peril—China and Japan. He said that if Germany had been permitted (by Great Britain) to attack Russia before 1939, Hitler could have been the bulwark against the yellow races and the Russians. He said that the British and the "fools in Washington" spoiled this plan. In conclusion he informed the group that although the America First Committee could not be active at the moment, it should take prompt advantage of the inevitable casualty lists to make the American people realize that they have been betrayed by Great Britain and the Roosevelt Administration. The[n], he said, the America First Committee would re-enter the political field and advocate a negotiated peace—favorable to Hitler.<sup>16</sup>

This passage is strikingly similar in both specific information and layout to an FBI report that Hoover sent to Roosevelt on 13 February 1942. In it, Hoover described the dinner party and Lindbergh's comments. Hoover's source of information, significantly, was both the Brigham wiretap and a report he had received from MID.<sup>17</sup>

15. Harold Ickes, "Charles A. Lindbergh: A Failure in Americanization," unpublished book manuscript, p. 4, Charles A. Lindbergh Folder, Ickes Papers, LOC; correspondence and book contract between Harold Ickes and Vanguard Press, December 1941 through 1944, Ickes Papers, LOC.

16. Ickes, "Charles A. Lindbergh: A Failure in Americanization," 207–9.

17. Confidential report re Ethel Brigham, P. E. Foxworth, 15 January 1942, pp. 30–31, 63,

Ickes, moreover, was not the sole recipient of this information. In August 1942, Lindbergh was subpoenaed to testify for the defense at the sedition trial of William Dudley Pelley, leader of the Silver Shirts. To assist the prosecutors in their cross-examination of Lindbergh, FBI officials prepared a blind memorandum that summarized information in bureau files that confirmed the aviator's "foreign or nationalistic sympathies." This summary included the derogatory intelligence gleaned illegally from the Brigham wiretap. Yet, because Lindbergh's testimony was limited to twelve minutes and because he offered nothing important to the defendant's case, Justice Department attorneys did not use the information in the FBI's summary to discredit his testimony.<sup>18</sup>

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SAC Foxworth, of the New York office, discontinued the Brigham wiretap on 30 December 1941, and then prepared a summary report on the investigation for Hoover. In the eighty-nine-page document, labeled "INTERNAL SECURITY-G[ermany]," Foxworth summarized the nine reports he had sent to Hoover, while continuing to employ euphemistic language in reference to the illegal wiretap. A large section of the report was reserved for information gathered on prominent foreign policy critics, like Lindbergh, but the FBI has redacted most of it. The summary report stands as evidence that FBI officials were most interested not in criminal developments but in political intelligence from the Brigham wiretap.<sup>19</sup>

After having received this report, Hoover ordered Foxworth to follow up several loose ends. He stressed that the "possible existence" of the One Gun Club "advocating revolution be exhaustively investigated." It is important to note that all information relative to the so-called One Gun Club was uncorroborated and stemmed from the heated conversations of Ethel Brigham. This being the case, Hoover ordered the follow-up to "be

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FBI 100-50729-19; confidential letter and enclosures, Brigadier General Raymond E. Lee to J. Edgar Hoover, 15 January 1942, FBI 100-4712-270; memorandum and attachments, John J. McCloy to Henry Stimson, 12 January 1942, Henry Stimson Papers (microfilm ed., reel 105), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University, New Haven, CT; personal and confidential letter, J. Edgar Hoover to Edwin M. Watson, 13 February 1942, Official File 10-B, FDRL; memorandum, D. Milton Ladd to J. Edgar Hoover, 13 February 1942, FBI 100-4712-334; memorandum, J. Edgar Hoover to Francis Biddle, 13 February 1942, FBI 100-4712-284.

18. Memorandum, K. T. (illegible) to Mr. Mumford, 5 August 1942, FBI 65-11449-152; blind and undated memorandum re Charles A. Lindbergh (ca. 5 August 1942), FBI 65-11449-152; Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists*, 534.

19. Confidential report, Foxworth to FBI HQ, 15 January 1942, FBI 100-50729-19.

handled in a most discreet manner.” A second follow-up that interested Hoover was in ascertaining the identity of the person Barbara Brigham claimed had visited the White House biweekly. Regarding these two loose ends, Hoover demanded immediate action and regular reports.<sup>20</sup>

The information culled from the Brigham wiretap was not limited to FBI officials and a memorandum to Roosevelt regarding Charles Lindbergh’s dinner-party chats. On 26 January 1942, Hoover provided the White House with detailed information on the Brighams. The FBI director informed Roosevelt’s secretary, Edwin Watson, that a member of the Brigham family had threatened the life of the president and had then referred to the existence of a One Gun Club as “ready to start a revolution” once the United States was at war. By referencing these two items, Hoover firmly established the bona fides of his investigation, yet he was also careful to make no mention that the information had been uncorroborated (One Gun Club) or had been dismissed months before by the Secret Service (assassination threat). Noting Barbara’s claim of knowing a person who met Roosevelt biweekly, yet hated him “as much as do the Brighams,” Hoover provided Watson with a list of names, one of which, he thought, might be this contact. Some of these names FBI agents had acquired from the Brigham houseguest-turned-informer, a source developed through the course of the illegal wiretap. Hoover also relayed to the White House some political intelligence that originated from the wiretap, including Ethel’s comment that her nephew, a Coast Guardsman, hated wearing his uniform and that the Brighams were associated with the recently arrested Laura Ingalls. Hoover even made an erroneous claim to the White House that the America First Committee was somehow associated with the One Gun Club—an assertion that was never unearthed in the Brigham wiretap or investigation, but was made by Hoover because Ethel and Barbara were supposedly linked and they were members of the New York branch of America First. Hoover made no mention as to the origins of this information other than that it had originated “through a confidential source.”<sup>21</sup>

Hoover did not stop his agents’ monitoring of the Brighams with this report to the White House. The New York office continued to watch the Brighams, ostensibly to determine the existence of the One Gun Club

20. Confidential letter, Hoover to Foxworth, 24 January 1942, FBI 100–50729–19.

21. Personal and confidential letter and attached blind memorandum, Hoover to Watson, 26 January 1942, Official File 10-B, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library (FDRL), Hyde Park, NY; memorandum with attached blind memorandum, Hoover to attorney general, 26 January 1942, FBI 100–50729–20.



and a possible plot against Roosevelt, but since the Brigham wiretap had been canceled FBI agents were forced to rely upon informers and physical surveillance. And, again, these sources revealed to FBI officials no information about a One Gun Club or a nefarious plot, but tantalizing political intelligence. In one instance, while attending her daughter's play "The Land Is Bright," Ethel Brigham was alleged to have made "a violent outburst" against Roosevelt and his foreign policy which FBI officials deemed to be "un-American." This information so interested FBI agents that they located and interviewed audience and cast members to confirm that Brigham was "a boisterous advocate of isolationism and strongly opposed to the President and his Foreign Policy."<sup>22</sup>

While agents in New York recorded Ethel's impetuous public remarks, agents in Washington tried to ascertain her travel habits. Gaining access to Brigham's passport records, agents learned of her various European travels (part of her musical career) as well as further personal data. FBI agents then attempted to follow up a lead in Pennsylvania that suggested Brigham had "subversive tendencies," but nothing of any value was uncovered.<sup>23</sup>

Because they were relying on informers and physical surveillance, and because these sources had unearthed no valuable information, on 4 June 1942 Assistant FBI Director D. Milton Ladd reauthorized the Brigham wiretap. Significantly, neither Ladd nor Hoover sought approval from the attorney general prior to renewing the wiretap. In so doing, they violated not only the 1934 Federal Communications Act but Roosevelt's 1940 directive that the attorney general authorize all wiretaps. FBI officials rationalized their action by basing it on "the original authority granted by the Attorney General." Attorney General Biddle, however, had authorized the original wiretap only when presented with information about a possible assassination plot. The continuance of this wiretap, therefore, had nothing to do with a threat made against the president, suggesting that FBI officials might not have been confident that Biddle would have consented. Indeed, Biddle wrote in 1962 that as attorney general he had not made it a "habit" to consent to wiretaps because he viewed their use as a "dirty business." If so, and there is no reason to doubt Biddle's word, the action taken here by senior FBI officials demonstrates that they had gained a not insignificant level of investigative autonomy by 1942 because they could authorize illegal wiretaps with little or no oversight. Such investigative freedom is a

22. Report, SAC New York to FBI HQ, 2 March 1942, FBI 100-50729-23; confidential letter, Foxworth to Hoover, 18 May 1942, FBI 100-50729-25.

23. Report, SAC Washington, DC to FBI HQ, 19 May 1942, FBI 100-50729-26; report, SAC Philadelphia to FBI HQ, 20 May 1942, FBI 100-50729-27.



hallmark of the emergence of the domestic security state, and reflects later and similar FBI activity during the Cold War.<sup>24</sup>

When reestablishing the wiretap on 24 June, following FBI procedure, it was assigned a “symbol number”—the code-identification for wiretap or microphone surveillance targets. (The FBI has withheld the Brigham symbol number.) The symbol number was then incorporated into the Symbol Number Sensitive Source Index (now called the National Security Electronic Surveillance Card File), a centralized finding aid for FBI bugs and wiretaps. By citing the symbol number in their correspondence and reports, FBI agents would not reveal their source to be a sensitive one. In the case of Brigham, FBI agents cited the symbol number in their correspondence or, most often, referred to the wiretap as “confidential informant [symbol number].”<sup>25</sup>

With the reinstitution of the Brigham wiretap, SAC Foxworth regarded its fruits to be “of value.”<sup>26</sup> On a weekly basis he briefed Hoover about the wiretap, which, yet again, revealed no criminal or domestic security threat but “additional anti-Roosevelt, anti-Semitic, and continued isolationist attitude on the part of Ethel and Barbara Brigham.”<sup>27</sup> And, again, some of the information obtained from this illegal wiretap was shared with the Roosevelt White House. In this instance, FBI agents intercepted a conversation between Ethel and an unidentified individual suggesting that Ethel had learned from an “underground source” that Britain and Germany were meeting secretly in Belgium and that this would result in the United States “holding the bag.” These comments were wholly without corroboration, and clearly should not have been regarded as significant, but on 20 July 1942 Hoover forwarded the information to the attorney general, Harry Hopkins, MID, and Adolf Berle. None of these recipients were informed

24. Letter and accompanying memorandum, Foxworth to Hoover, 21 May 1942, FBI 100-50729-28; memorandum, J. K. Mumford to Ladd, 3 June 1942, FBI 100-50729-30; memorandum, Hoover to Foxworth, 9 June 1942, FBI 100-50729-31; memorandum, Mumford to Ladd, 3 June 1942, FBI 100-50729-30; Francis Biddle, *In Brief Authority* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1962), 166, 168.

25. Memorandum, E. G. Fitch to Ladd, 6 July 1942, FBI 100-50729-35; Athan Theoharis and John Cox, *The Boss: J. Edgar Hoover and the Great American Inquisition* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 9-10.

26. See personal and confidential letter, Foxworth to Hoover, 27 June 1942, FBI 100-50729-33; letter, Foxworth to Hoover, 7 July 1942, FBI 100-50729-34; letter, Foxworth to Hoover, 14 July 1942, FBI 100-50729-36; letter, Foxworth to Hoover, 18 July 1942, FBI 100-50729-38.

27. Letter, Hoover to Foxworth, 12 August 1942, FBI 100-50729-42; report, SAC Foxworth to FBI HQ, 14 July 1942, FBI 100-50729-37.

as to Hoover's source, but his sharing of this information can best be understood as part of Hoover's effort to break into the field of foreign intelligence. Since at least 1940, Hoover had vied with Colonel William Donovan—head of the OSS during the Second World War—for a role in foreign intelligence and operations; and this bit of information, no matter how absurd, was part of his effort to prove himself in this area. It also reflects Hoover's use of indirect targets to gather political (and in this case foreign) intelligence on larger targets (e.g., the America First Committee and anti-interventionist movement).<sup>28</sup>

With weekly approvals from senior FBI officials, the New York office maintained the Brigham wiretap until 26 October 1942. Throughout 1942, the wiretap yielded no criminal or security information and only more political intelligence, much of it caustic. On 17 July, for example, FBI agents overheard Ethel state that "the President is unable to stand on his own feet, let alone think, and that he is only the front man for the Jews who are desirous of getting a ring around the world and want to smash the United States." On 5 August she reportedly referred to Roosevelt as "that idiot at the helm of this country." On 16 August she referred to Roosevelt's refusal to utilize Charles Lindbergh's services after the United States had entered the war—in April 1941 Lindbergh had resigned his Army Air Corps commission as a colonel—as "part of the crookedness . . . of the President." These examples are representative of the type of information FBI agents developed during the course of this wiretap. Most of it was vitriolic, emotional, and sometimes anti-Semitic and it is compelling that agents in their reports were so focused on reporting this political intelligence. Despite nothing being developed about the One Gun Club, Hoover continually approved the wiretap's use because, as Foxworth repeatedly said in his wiretap continuance requests, information "of value" had been collected.<sup>29</sup>

28. Letter, SAC New York to FBI HQ, 14 July 1942, FBI 100-50729-39; memorandum, Ladd to Hoover, 16 July 1942, FBI 100-50729-40; memorandum, Hoover to attorney general, 20 July 1942; personal and confidential letter, Hoover to Hopkins, 20 July 1942; personal and confidential letter, Hoover to General Kroner, 20 July 1942; personal and confidential letter, Hoover to Berle, 20 July 1942; all in FBI 100-50729-40.

29. Confidential letter, SAC Foxworth to Hoover, 4 September 1942, FBI 100-50729-47; confidential letter, SAC Foxworth to Hoover, 22 September 1942, FBI 100-50729-49; letter, SAC Foxworth to Hoover, 2 October 1942, FBI 100-50729-50; confidential letter, SAC Foxworth to Hoover, 20 October 1942, FBI 100-50729-51; confidential letter, SAC Foxworth to Hoover, 18 October 1942, FBI 100-50729-52; report, SAC Foxworth to FBI HQ, 10 December 1942, FBI 100-50729-54. It is interesting to note that following the wiretap's discontinuance, reports regarding Ethel Brigham were, in addition to labeled

By 1943, FBI officials' view of the Brighams had changed significantly. By that date, Roosevelt's anti-interventionist critics were a non-issue and the Brigham source for political intelligence had dried up. FBI officials' view of the Brighams in 1943 reveals as much and reflects a more objective analysis as to their activities:

Since the long investigation conducted with regard to Mrs. Ethel Brigham and her family has not indicated that they are engaged in any un-American activities, and since their rabid and vicious statements have been considered harmless by unprejudiced Americans who have had frequent opportunity to judge the background and character of this family, the collateral leads set out in the above referenced report are being disregarded and this case is being closed in the New York Field Office.<sup>30</sup>

The FBI's investigation of Ethel Brigham and her family proves that FBI officials had, in fact, gathered political intelligence concerning anti-interventionists from an illegal wiretap and then shared select portions of it with the White House. The investigation and wiretap may have originated in a legitimate probe of a threat on the president's life and rumors as to the existence of a group advocating revolt, but that threat was not serious and the group's existence was unfounded. Nevertheless, FBI officials successfully used these premises to maintain their wiretap, which proved, in reality, to be a valued source of political surveillance on prominent Roosevelt critics like the America First Committee and Charles Lindbergh. Interestingly, in October 1941, Hoover explicitly denied to Robert E. Wood, chairman of the America First Committee, that the FBI "directly or indirectly at any place in the United States tapped the wires, interfered with the mails, or checked the membership lists of the America First Committee." While this statement came just one month prior to the Brigham wiretap, there were other wiretaps, and we now know that Hoover's general statement was untrue in all respects and his sincerity suspect.<sup>31</sup>

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"internal security," labeled "custodial detention." FBI officials apparently regarded Brigham as some type of security risk, placing her on the FBI's emergency detention list. On custodial detention see Athan Theoharis, *Spying on Americans: Political Surveillance from Hoover to the Huston Plan* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), 40–64.

30. Report, SAC New York to FBI HQ, 1 July 1943, FBI 100–50729–60.

31. Letter, Hoover to Wood, 17 October 1941, Box 60, America First Committee Papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Stanford, CA. For other wiretaps, like Grunewald's, see Douglas M. Charles, "Informing FDR: FBI Political Surveillance and the Isolationist–Interventionist Foreign Policy Debate, 1939–1945," *Diplomatic History* 24 (Spring 2000): 219.

The value of this illegal wiretap as a source of political intelligence is further demonstrated by FBI officials continuing it after Secret Service agents had dismissed the Brigham assassination threat, and further underscored by the decision of senior FBI officials not to seek the attorney general's consent to reestablish the wiretap in 1942. This was a violation of Roosevelt's wiretap directive, a violation of the law, and demonstrates that FBI officials were concerned with losing a valuable source should the civil libertarian Biddle be briefed. The wiretap is also illustrative of the domestic security state inasmuch as Hoover clearly had a significant level of autonomy in authorizing and maintaining illegal wiretaps, and it clearly shows the FBI's new role as the White House intelligence arm in that the political intelligence he generated helped to sustain administration views of its critics as subversive—Hoover's erroneous claim that America First was linked to the One Gun Club, for instance, and that America First members wanted the president dead.

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FBI officials lost interest in the Brighams after it became clear that the anti-interventionists were no longer a threat to the Roosevelt administration's foreign policy. The FBI's self-described "extensive investigation"<sup>32</sup> of Lindbergh also lost momentum once the Great Debate passed into history, which is yet another example of the operation of the domestic security state—only real or perceived political threats receive investigative attention; when that passes all interest in "domestic security" issues ends. The FBI's last documented interest in Lindbergh, in November 1942, involved the curator of the Yale University Library, who informed Hoover that his institution had acquired "a large collection of mail" addressed to Lindbergh from a variety of Americans and offered the FBI access to this material. (The Yale Sterling Library holds the still-sealed Lindbergh papers.) FBI officials welcomed the invitation "in view of the possibility that it might be considered advisable to examine Lindbergh's mail in connection with any of the cases being investigated by the FBI." Hoover briefed his Justice Department superiors, but there is no indication in extant FBI files as to whether the records were examined.<sup>33</sup>

In striking contrast to this, by 1944, FBI officials had almost no interest in Lindbergh. That year, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt received a letter from

32. Blind memorandum, 27 January 1942, FBI 65-39945-26X, p. 4.

33. Letter, R. H. Simons to Hoover, 13 November 1942, FBI 65-11449-155; memorandum, Hoover to Smith, 16 December 1942, FBI 65-11449-155.

an American who was “troubled about Charles Lindbergh’s . . . whereabouts.” President Roosevelt brought the letter to Hoover’s attention and personally asked him how his wife should “answer this one.” In contrast to Hoover’s previous responses to requests from the president (especially personal requests) where he would demand summary reports from his subordinates, check FBI files for information, and dispatch a personal and confidential memorandum to the president, this time Hoover merely suggested that the First Lady send a letter of acknowledgment and appreciation. It is not insignificant to the functioning and nature of the domestic security state that forlorn prominent critics were ignored by FBI officials at this particular time while people on the radical fringe—like Lawrence Dennis and company—were targeted for indictment. Prominent critics are good sources for political intelligence; fringe figures, whose investigations do not draw scrutiny, are prosecuted.<sup>34</sup>

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Another vocal Roosevelt administration critic who received special FBI attention after the declaration of war was the prominent revisionist historian, sociologist, criminologist, and social critic Harry Elmer Barnes. A Columbia University-educated historian, Barnes was well known for his college textbooks *World Politics in Modern Civilization* (1930), *A History of Western Civilization* (1937), and *An Intellectual and Cultural History of the Western World* (1937). His best-known work, however, was his revisionist tract *Genesis of the World War* (1926) in which Barnes laid blame for the First World War not on Germany but on France and Russia. In total, Barnes published over thirty books and hundreds of essays, so that when he finally joined the chorus of anti-interventionists during the late 1930s, his scholarly reputation made him an articulate and prominent critic of Roosevelt’s foreign policy.

But why did the politically liberal Barnes—an early New Deal supporter—join with the mostly conservative anti-interventionist movement? The explanation for Barnes’s defection is rooted in his First World War revisionism, which evolved to underpin his criticisms of New Deal diplomacy, especially in his belief that intervention was part of American imperialism. He, therefore, was willing to serve as a speaker for the America First Committee to oppose Roosevelt’s increasingly un-neutral foreign

34. Memorandum, Roosevelt to Hoover, 3 September 1944, FBI 65–11449–158; letter, Hoover to Edwin M. Watson, 6 September 1944, FBI 65–11449–158.

policy. In addition, Barnes served as vice chairman of the Keep Out of War Congress and edited the anti-interventionist newsletter *Uncensored*.

Barnes's political defection was not unconsidered and not without personal and professional consequences. By siding with conservatives who saw a threat in Roosevelt's centralization of power, Barnes alienated himself from his publishers. D. C. Heath, for example, wrote Barnes in 1941 advising him that because of the "somewhat hysterical times," they decided "not to undertake your book, no matter how good." Effectively blackballed, the liberal Barnes began to publish with conservative presses to criticize the American entrance into the Second World War and the events leading up to Pearl Harbor. The conservative Caxton Press published his revisionist Second World War study *Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace* (1953), while Barnes also published essays in conservative periodicals like the *National Review*.<sup>35</sup>

While FBI agents monitored Barnes's activities dating from 1936 (until 1944), their surveillance only intensified when he became a spokesperson for the anti-interventionist movement. Historian Roy Turnbaugh has explained the FBI's interest in Barnes as a reaction to his New Deal criticisms of the bureau—that it had propagandized its image in the 1930s and was not above reproach. Turnbaugh thereby concluded that when Barnes became a critic of Roosevelt's foreign policy, Hoover used this opportunity to enact retribution. While on one level this assessment has merit, the FBI's interest in Barnes is best understood within the larger context of the FBI's widespread surveillance of the anti-interventionists.<sup>36</sup>

In February 1936, Barnes began to make public comments about the FBI that were not in harmony with Hoover's carefully crafted public image. As a result, the FBI director dispatched agents to monitor Barnes's talks. One agent attended a talk Barnes gave in Scranton, Pennsylvania, on the topic of crime where the professor said that neither Hoover nor the attorney general had actually done anything to stem racketeering. One

35. Letter, Frank W. Scott to Harry Elmer Barnes, 31 January 1941, Harry Elmer Barnes Papers, Box 27, American Heritage Center (hereafter AHC), University of Wyoming, Laramie, WY. On Barnes see Justus D. Doenecke, "Harry Elmer Barnes," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 56 (Summer 1973): 311–23; Doenecke, "Harry Elmer Barnes: Prophet of a 'Usable' Past," *History Teacher* 8 (February 1975): 265–76. It should be noted that, later in life, Barnes denied German responsibility for starting the Second World War and he became a Holocaust denier. See Justice Doenecke, *The Battle against Intervention, 1939–1941* (Malabar, FL: Krieger, 1997), 22.

36. Roy Turnbaugh, "The FBI and Harry Elmer Barnes: 1936–1944," *Historian* 42 (May 1980): 385–98. See also Roy Turnbaugh, "The Quest for Truth and Justice: Harry Elmer Barnes" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 1977).

comment, in particular, caught the attention of the snooping agent. Barnes reportedly said that Hoover had “hoodwinked the public with a lot of cheap publicity in the tracking down of a few criminals.” The professor stated further that vaunted criminals like John Dillinger, among others, were in reality only insignificant, small-time crooks. Such comments led FBI agents to conclude that Barnes had “Communitistic tendencies.” While FBI agents might have been led to this simplistic conclusion, Barnes took great pains to deny that he was a communist. In April 1941, for instance, he felt compelled to write the Indianapolis branch of the American Legion to protest their condemnation of him as a communist.<sup>37</sup>

Barnes’s criticism of the FBI was not restricted to one speech. In November 1936, while in St. Louis, he again criticized the bureau in a fashion similar to his previous commentary. He claimed that FBI agents sought only “small fry” criminals while ignoring the more sophisticated mobsters, thereby throwing “dust into the eyes of the public.” These new public comments prompted FBI official Louis Nichols to recommend on 9 December 1936:

While it might be advisable to ignore Barnes, nevertheless I feel that such remarks as set forth above should not go unchallenged as they are derogatory and convey the impression that Barnes is attempting to discredit our Bureau, and I feel that his hand should be called, particularly when he by innuendo questions our honesty. Therefore, it is suggested that some vigorous representative of the Bureau interview Barnes and ask him for any information or evidence that he has as to the “10,000 most dangerous criminals who scorn to steal less than \$10,000 at a time” whom “the Federal Department of Justice does not choose to meddle with.” Then if Barnes is unable to furnish any accurate information regarding them which come within our investigative jurisdiction, it is suggested that he be summarily placed in his proper place. It is believed that it would be inadvisable to write him a letter. However, if the above course is not deemed desirable, then I would like to suggest that the Director consider the feasibility of quoting Barnes in some future address as illustrative of the hoity

37. Letter, SAC Philadelphia to Hoover, 10 February 1936, FBI 100-6715-X; memorandum, R. Joseph to Tolson, 14 February 1936, FBI 100-6715-X1. (The Harry Elmer Barnes FBI file can be found in his papers, box 196, at the American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.) Letter, Barnes to Homer Chaillaux, 18 April 1941, Barnes Papers, AHC; letter, Chaillaux to Barnes, 6 May 1941, Barnes Papers, AHC. On Hoover’s carefully crafted Depression-era image see Richard Gid Powers, *G-Men: Hoover’s FBI in American Popular Culture* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983).



toity professors who are so impractical and who really are undermining good law enforcement rather than bolstering it.<sup>38</sup>

Irrespective of Nichols's suggestion, senior FBI officials apparently decided not to pursue these ends.

Curiously, Barnes fell off the bureau's radar until 1940. In December of that year, while perusing the files of an unnamed left-leaning group, FBI agents learned that Barnes had given his endorsement to the magazine *Soviet Russia Today*. Agents also found Barnes's name listed as a member of the National Commission for Defense of Political Prisoners and as a board member of People's Lobby, Inc. Given these findings and knowledge that Barnes was connected to some recent but unspecified "questionable activity" in Washington, D.C., FBI agents tried to ascertain his "present whereabouts." Their interest centered on whether Barnes was currently "engaged in any form of un-American activity." For unspecified reasons, Hoover ended this specific inquiry in January 1941 but did not lose interest in Barnes altogether.<sup>39</sup>

Barnes again caught the attention of FBI officials during the summer of 1941 when an informant claimed the professor was a Fifth Columnist and Nazi mouthpiece. Then, in July, another informant accused him of being associated with "radical and semi-radical" groups and activities worldwide. As evidence, the informant listed Barnes's various jobs and associations, which were, to him, a clear indication of communism. At year's end, even the army's intelligence apparatus—MID—had reiterated to FBI officials that Barnes was "a dangerous man." Barnes was not ignorant of these charges, but was puzzled by them because, as he told a friend, "the FBI has been consulting me frequently this spring about appointments to their force." None of the various charges leveled against Barnes were substantiated, nor did it seem to matter. Taken as a whole, the charges confirmed for FBI officials (and others) that Barnes was a subversive and, thereby, a domestic security threat. These accusations, which coincided with Barnes's criticisms of the Roosevelt administration, led FBI officials by 1943 to attempt to develop a sedition case against him.<sup>40</sup>

38. Memorandum, Louis Nichols to Mr. Joseph, 9 December 1936, FBI 100-6715-X2.

39. Report, SAC Washington DC to FBI HQ, 17 December 1940, FBI 100-6715-1; letter, Hoover to SAC Washington DC, 7 January 1941, FBI 100-6715-1.

40. Letter and enclosure, Hoover to SAC Washington, DC, 23 June 1941, FBI 100-6715-3; memorandum, K. R. McIntire to Mr. Kramer, 3 July 1941, FBI 100-6715-4; blind memorandum re Harry Elmer Barnes, 3 July 1941, FBI 100-6715-4; letter and enclosure, Colonel J. T. Bissell to Hoover, 5 December 1941 (FBI document number missing but in Barnes FBI



It is curious that Barnes did not draw more attention from FBI agents during 1941 and 1942. Only in 1943 did FBI agents investigate Barnes in a concerted effort to prosecute and thereby silence the rabble-rousing professor. This can only be understood in the context of other sedition cases of the time—that during wartime the government believed it could silence its more outspoken critics—and, moreover, that the domestic security state had developed sufficiently within the FBI to proceed with such cases. Just prior to the development of its sedition case in 1943, FBI agents were informed that a professor at Kansas City University, a Professor Trimble who was associated with America First, had used Barnes's college text, *Social Institutions*, in 1942. Since the textbook was published after the American entrance into war, and because it was critical of the government, the informant believed the book was an indirect attempt to discredit the Roosevelt administration. As corroboration, a Professor Mannheim was quoted in reference to the book that it was "obnoxious and . . . not the type of literature for college freshmen." Throughout the text of the book Barnes was accused of using "a subtle style" while "cleverly" trying to turn the government toward fascism. Supporting this contention was the fact that Barnes had listed one of George Sylvester Viereck's books in his bibliography. The Kansas City, Missouri, field office offered to follow up the matter by collecting passages from the book but Hoover rejected the proposal as "unnecessary."<sup>41</sup>

Barnes was not oblivious to the concerns voiced in 1942 about his textbook *Social Institutions*. His editor at Prentice Hall, S. E. Carll, wrote Barnes and asked him to review carefully the statements he made in his book. Given Carll's concerns with this specific book at this particular time, it seems likely that FBI agents interviewed or contacted him in some manner. In any event, Carll assured Barnes that he did not think he was guilty of sedition yet admonished him, probably not coincidentally, that an impressionable student could show the book to his or her parents, who, not understanding the context of Barnes's writing, might "take exception to it and consider it their patriotic duty to report the book to the FBI. Then

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file); letter, Barnes to Ralph Tiede, 6 July 1941, Barnes Papers, AHC. Patrick Washburn discusses the government's pursuit of some of its more vocal critics after 1942 for sedition in "FDR versus His Own Attorney General: The Struggle over Sedition, 1941–42," *Journalism Quarterly* 62 (Winter 1985): 717–24.

41. Report, SAC Kansas City to FBI HQ, 23 December 1942, FBI 100–6715–6; letter, Hoover to SAC Kansas City, 2 February 1942, FBI 100–6715–6. See also the Justice Department's unredacted copy of this report in file 146–28–840, box 103, Classified Subjects File, Record Group (RG) 60, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), College Park, MD.

your trouble begins.” While the editor claimed this possibility was merely “hypothetical,” he confided that “strange things can happen in times of stress.” Moreover, concern with a nonconformist textbook and concurrent FBI investigation for sedition, reflects the developing domestic security state. During the Cold War, college textbooks that fell short of consensus history, such as those written by Charles and Mary Beard, were roundly attacked and subsequently abandoned by publishers. In fact, one leading textbook author of the Cold War era advised students that “[t]he FBI urges Americans to report direct to its offices any suspicions they may have about Communist activity on the part of their fellow Americans.” Such informing was not unique to the Cold War, and indeed was alive and well during the era of the domestic security state.<sup>42</sup>

Yet it was only in 1943 that the FBI and the Roosevelt administration pursued Barnes in an effort to prosecute him for sedition. As previously noted, he was not the only individual the Roosevelt administration targeted using the sedition statutes. Following the American entrance into the Second World War, the Roosevelt administration and FBI investigated, detained, and prosecuted a number of individuals for making allegedly seditious statements. According to Assistant Attorney General Wendell Berge, the government was prepared to use provisions of the Espionage and Smith Acts, as well as the seditious conspiracy statute against “disloyal utterance,” to silence vocal government critics. Berge stressed to Attorney General Biddle that “we must remember that the good common sense and patriotism of the American people are their country’s greatest safeguards against disloyal utterance” because “passers of spurious coin are being recognized for what they are” and that their views “will be rejected.” Civil liberties seemed not to be an issue with Berge.<sup>43</sup>

Biddle, however, was more civil liberties-minded than either Berge or Roosevelt and, in fact, ordered the release of a number of individuals the government had arrested and dropped their prosecutions. The attorney general wanted to avoid reckless prosecutions like those carried out during the First World War when American citizens criticized President Wilson’s policy. Among those Biddle released, for example, was Ellis O. Jones, who had publicly advocated impeaching Roosevelt for seeking a

42. Letter, S. E. Carll, editor, Prentice Hall, to Barnes, 25 April 1942, Barnes Papers, Box 28, AHC; Ralph Henry Gabriel as quoted in Peter Charles Hoffer, *Past Imperfect: Facts, Fictions, Fraud—American History from Bancroft and Parkman to Ambrose, Bellesiles, Ellis, and Goodwin* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 46.

43. Memorandum, Assistant Attorney General Wendell Berge to Biddle, 24 March 1942, Francis Biddle Papers, FDRL.

war declaration. Biddle also prevented the administration from using the Smith Act to silence some members of the press. Yet despite this restraint, others who were more pronounced in their opinions were sought and in some instances prosecuted. These included the thirty who were indicted in 1944. FBI Director Hoover, sensing the administration's interest in political intelligence on its critics prior to Pearl Harbor and its desire to silence some afterward, tried to develop information that the Justice Department could use to issue indictments for sedition. Harry Elmer Barnes was one of the first such cases which peaked with the indictment of the thirty.<sup>44</sup>

By 1943 FBI agents began actively to develop information on Barnes so the Justice Department could prosecute him "under the Sedition Statutes." The effort began in Albany, New York, where the SAC reported that Barnes was "long associated" with communist front groups and "isolationist movements." The agent recognized the professor as "strongly anti-British and noticeably opposed to President Roosevelt and [the] present administration," and when he read a newspaper article reflecting this he dispatched an agent to interview the journalist who wrote it.<sup>45</sup>

In their efforts to develop a sedition case, FBI agents interviewed numerous people to determine Barnes's political views. One interviewee in Albany, named Regine Kurlander, volunteered that after she met Barnes in Cleveland, she determined he was "completely Fascist and no longer a liberal." She said Barnes claimed that Roosevelt had maneuvered the country into war with Pearl Harbor, and reported that he had made disparaging comments about Winston Churchill and Chiang Kai-shek.<sup>46</sup>

By March, the Kansas City, Missouri, field office again reported on Barnes and his textbook, concluding that he was a subversive and thereby liable for prosecution. One "confidential informant," probably a professor at Kansas City University, criticized Barnes as an academic because he "debunks and criticizes everything called 'Americanism.'" This same informant, who believed Barnes was not a fascist but "inclined to Socialism and Communism," also offered the opinion that he was "a short sighted

44. Francis Biddle, *In Brief Authority* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1962), 234–35; Wayne S. Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists, 1932–45* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 533–34; Washburn, "FDR versus His Own Attorney General," 717. On the various civil liberties views within the Justice Department, see Richard W. Steele, *Free Speech in the Good War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).

45. Report, SAC Albany to FBI HQ, 23 January 1943, FBI 100–6715–8; report, SAC Albany to FBI HQ, 23 January 1943, file 146–28–840, box 103, RG 60, NARA; memorandum, Hoover to SAC Albany, 2 March 1943, FBI 100–6715–8.

46. Report, SAC Albany to FBI HQ, 23 January 1943, FBI 100–6715–8; report, SAC Albany to FBI HQ, 23 January 1943, file 146–28–840, box 103, RG 60, NARA.

rationalist who would go so far as anarchy; he is pedagogically dangerous.” The informant again resurrected the specter of Barnes’s book *Social Justice*, commenting that it was “bad for students because it presents a too one-sided viewpoint and criticizes American ideals and traditions to the extreme.” All of this suggested to FBI officials that Barnes was indeed guilty of sedition or, possibly, they took what information they developed irrespective of its efficacy to service administration desires for prosecutions.<sup>47</sup>

FBI agents were then dispatched to Barnes’s hometown of Cooperstown, New York, to ascertain more specific information about him. One FBI agent interviewed the Cooperstown assistant postmaster, J. Gilchrist, to ascertain if there was anything unusual about what Barnes received in the mail; Gilchrist reported nothing unusual. An agent also interviewed the director of the Cooperstown branch of the New York State Historical Association, who reported that after Barnes spoke to the group his reputation in the community plummeted. Also offering critical commentary were the town clerk, village commissioner, mayor, and several other individuals. To FBI agents, these comments, in toto, further confirmed, apparently, that Barnes was liable for prosecution for sedition.<sup>48</sup>

By late April 1943, with the above constituting FBI officials’ accumulated information about Barnes, FBI Director Hoover forwarded it to Wendell Berge for his opinion as to “a violation of the Sedition Statutes and if you believe further investigation is warranted.” The assistant attorney general responded that the evidence collected did not warrant prosecution and he suggested that FBI agents discontinue their probe. Hoover, therefore, advised the Albany field office to suspend its investigation but advised them that if further information “of a seditious nature” were received, it should be reported.<sup>49</sup>

FBI agents, indeed, continued to collect intelligence on Barnes. In May an agent in Kansas City, still interested in Barnes’s book *Social Institutions*, tried to ascertain “the phraseology of certain passages” because they allegedly “indicated the subject’s anti-American sentiment.” The agent was unable to complete his task, however, because his informant—a student—

47. Report, SAC Kansas City to FBI HQ, 9 March 1943, FBI 100-6715-10; report, SAC Kansas City to FBI HQ, 9 March 1943, file 146-28-840, box 103, RG 60, NARA.

48. Report, SAC Albany to FBI HQ, 30 March 1943, FBI 100-6715-12; report, SAC Albany to FBI HQ, 30 March 1943, File 146-28-840, Box 103, RG 60, NARA.

49. Memorandum, Hoover to Berge, 19 April 1943, FBI 100-6715-12; memorandum, Berge to Hoover, 26 April 1943, FBI 100-6715-14; memorandum, Hoover to SAC Albany, 14 May 1943, FBI 100-6715-14; memorandum, Hoover to Berge, 19 April 1943, File 146-28-840, Box 103, RG 60, NARA; memorandum, Berge to Hoover, 26 April 1943, File 146-28-840, Box 103, RG 60, NARA.

had finished the class work and no longer had a copy of the book. (Why the agent was unable to find his own copy is unknown.) Then, in June, the New York City special agent in charge reported Barnes's association with both the America Council on Public Affairs and the National Committee of International Juridical Association, and that he was a Communist party speaker. This information, some of which was purely speculative, suggested to FBI officials that Barnes was a seditionist not from any evidence but because he "expressed [a] very pessimistic attitude toward [the] U.S. notwithstanding the outcome of the war."<sup>50</sup>

The following month an FBI agent in Albany arranged an interview with one of Barnes's colleagues, Dr. Dixon Fox, a historian of the United States and president of Union College. The agent asked Fox about Barnes's speech before the New York State Historical Association—Fox was its president—and whether he believed it to be indicative of sedition. Fox's answers seem to have tempered FBI officials' view of Barnes. He told them that in his twenty-five-year association with Barnes, he found the professor to hold some Anglophobic feelings yet believed him "to be entirely open." Fox added that Barnes had the "disposition causing him to take the side of the minority in most disputes" and it was this that best explained his behavior. This interview was convincing enough for FBI officials, leading them to close the sedition case against Barnes.<sup>51</sup>

The closure of the sedition case did not end FBI officials' interest in Barnes, however. In December 1943, Barnes applied to be a consultant to the Office for Emergency Management (OEM) of the War Production Board, a job requiring an FBI background check. FBI agents' initial review resurrected his 1936 criticisms of the bureau and his prominent position as an anti-interventionist. When Hoover learned of Barnes's desire to join the administration, he ordered his subordinates to "[s]ee that he is thoroughly investigated as he is obviously a foul ball."<sup>52</sup>

Given Barnes's past and Hoover's opinion as to his qualifications for the OEM position, he ordered a "vigorous" and widespread investigation involving field offices in New York, New Jersey, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Massachusetts, and Washington, D.C. Each field office reported

50. Report, SAC Kansas City to FBI HQ, 13 May 1943, FBI 100-6715-15; report, SAC New York City to FBI HQ, 7 June 1943, FBI 100-6715-16; report, SAC New York City to FBI HQ, 7 June 1943, File 146-28-840, Box 103, RG 60, NARA.

51. Report, SAC Albany to FBI HQ, 30 July 1943, FBI 100-6715-17; report, SAC Albany to FBI HQ, 30 July 1943, File 146-28-840, Box 103, RG 60, NARA.

52. Letter, Dallas Dort, Office for Emergency Management, to Hoover, 8 December 1943, FBI 100-6715-17X; memorandum, G. C. Callan to Ladd, 19 January 1944, FBI 100-6715-17X.

in with information that only reiterated the information culled from the previous investigations of Barnes. The New York field office, however, concluded on 9 February 1944 that Barnes was “a dangerous man” due to his “superlative egotism” and his “flair for the spectacular.” Because Barnes allegedly hated the American government, the New York office determined that he “would either have some part in our government or go to jail.”<sup>53</sup>

With the field offices reporting in, Hoover used the information to ensure Barnes was not appointed to the government position. He forwarded to George Gould, the assistant of investigations at OEM, the most derogatory information collected on Barnes. Hoover then wrote Gould to inform him of Barnes’s criticism of the Justice Department’s New Deal crime control program. He also said Barnes claimed that big business had an interest in protecting large crime syndicates while the Justice Department “hoodwinked the public by tracking down second rate criminals like Dillinger, a poor hunted boy, who was denied his constitutional right to surrender.”<sup>54</sup>

It is unclear whether Hoover had succeeded in convincing Gould not to hire Barnes, but the effort was, in any event, fleeting. Historian Roy Turnbaugh, who has intimately studied Barnes’s life, wrote that even before Hoover had forwarded his information to Gould, the prison industry hired Barnes as a consultant.<sup>55</sup> Hoover’s action, nevertheless, is demonstrative of his long effort to serve the Roosevelt White House’s political interests and often doing so without prompting from superiors. It also shows the evolution of the domestic security state inasmuch as with Barnes, FBI agents went from monitoring foreign policy critics, to seditionists, to “un-Americans” like Barnes.



Laura Houghtaling Ingalls was a noted female aviator during the 1930s who, among other unusual aeronautical achievements, won \$2,500 in

53. Memorandum, Hoover to SAC New York, 19 January 1944, FBI 100-6715-17X; memorandum, G. C. Callan to Ladd, 22 February 1944, FBI 100-6715-2[5?]; report, SAC New York to FBI HQ, 9 February 1944, FBI 100-6715-24; memorandum, SAC New York to Hoover, 17 April 1944, FBI 100-6715-39. For the various FBI reports from the listed field offices, see Barnes’s FBI file, serials 100-6715-18X to-38.

54. Personal and confidential letter, Hoover to George Gould, 26 February 1944, FBI 100-6715-35; confidential letter, Hoover to George Gould, 17 March 1944, FBI 100-6715-35; memorandum, Tamm to Hoover, 12 February 1944, FBI 100-6715-37; memorandum, Ladd to Hoover, 22 March 1944, FBI 100-6715-34.

55. Turnbaugh, “The FBI and Harry Elmer Barnes,” 397.

an air race from New York to California. In terms of the prewar foreign policy debate, she had much in common with her male flying counterpart, Charles Lindbergh. Both were noted fliers and both were colorful and controversial speakers for the America First Committee. But unlike Lindbergh and other prominent America First members, Ingalls was the only significant member to have been prosecuted successfully for violating the Foreign Agents Registration Act—the law that FBI officials employed time and again in an attempt to develop cases against Roosevelt's prominent foreign policy critics. Her indictment in December 1941, and subsequent prosecution, became a black mark on the legitimacy of the anti-interventionist movement.

Yet her prosecution was an exception. Among sincere and mainstream anti-interventionists—those identified in the America First Committee and not radical fringe groups—Ingalls's case stands out in bright contrast.<sup>56</sup> While some America First members indeed held controversial views regarding Nazi Germany and American entrance into the European war, most never acted upon them. What best explains Ingalls as an exception to the rule was her naiveté. She admired alleged German “efficiency” and the country's efforts to rebuild its society amid the Great Depression, which, in part, led her to accept money from a German embassy official to supplement expenses she incurred while making speeches for the America First Committee. And while she had indeed violated the letter of the law—as stipulated in the Registration Act—her motives do not appear to have been insidious nor was there any genuine Nazi influence within the America First Committee.

This makes Ingalls's prosecution significant in two ways. First, it reflects FBI officials' strategy in pursuing Roosevelt's prominent, and legitimate, foreign policy critics. That is, to develop information that might have led to a successful prosecution under the Foreign Agents Registration Act (among other laws), which, in turn, would have discredited their opposition efforts. Second, her case stands out as illustrative of the view that legitimate critics were somehow subversive, a designation that was light on evidence yet valuable in justifying intense scrutiny. Indeed, after having successfully prosecuted the Ingalls case, FBI officials had hoped to use it as a model for future prosecutions of other mainstream critics but especially those who were associated with the America First Committee.

56. Fringe critics were prosecuted in the same manner as Ingalls, but she was not on their level. These include William Dudley Pelley, Fritz Kuhn, and Gerald L. K. Smith, all of whom were confirmed anti-Semites and leading figures in pro-Nazi groups.



Ingalls first came under FBI scrutiny not for any controversial foreign policy positions, but for her untoward inquiry about working for the FBI. Shortly before the outbreak of the European war, in August 1939, Ingalls found herself without gainful employment in either the airline industry or the military. Ingalls then decided to write Hoover asking to “work for you through the medium of my airplanes and perhaps serve my country as well—something I long to do; even though I am a woman—even in times of peace.” Hoover outright rejected Ingalls’s offer but, undaunted, she renewed it, stressing that there must be a position for a woman of her talents.<sup>57</sup>

Firmly an advocate of gender-specific roles, Hoover frowned upon employing Ingalls. The employment request, moreover, prompted FBI agents to delve into her background where they found information that besmirched her character. Agents took notice of a 29 September 1939 article in the *New York Times* that linked Ingalls to Catherine Curtis,<sup>58</sup> whom FBI officials regarded as “Fascist in her leanings and affiliations,” inasmuch as the two unsuccessfully had petitioned the Senate to hold hearings on the war. As a result of the Senate’s rejection, Ingalls flew her airplane at a low altitude between the Capitol and the White House while dropping antiwar pamphlets. The ramifications of this were significant for Ingalls in that she lost her pilot’s license (for violating restricted airspace) and had provided Hoover a rationale—beyond his chauvinism—in declining Ingalls’s second request for a job with the FBI.<sup>59</sup>

By 1941 Ingalls became a prominent speaker for the America First Committee—she was considered Lindbergh’s female counterpart—leading FBI officials to take a renewed interest in her activities.<sup>60</sup> At the root of their interest was, unsurprisingly, her role as a controversial foreign policy critic. And it was during the spring and summer of 1941 when FBI agents first learned of Ingalls’s contact with the German embassy in

57. Letter and resumé, Laura Ingalls to Hoover, 20 August 1939, FBI 100–34712–1X2; letter, Nathan to Ingalls, 25 August 1939, FBI 100–43712–1X2; letter, Ingalls to Nathan, 13 September 1939, FBI 100–43712–1X2. (The Ingalls FBI file can be found in Wayne Cole’s papers at the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library.)

58. Catherine Curtis later became a speaker for the America First Committee. She also became head of one of the right-wing mother’s organizations that opposed the war, Women Investors in America.

59. Letter, Hoover to Ingalls, 2 October 1939, FBI 100–34712–1X2; blind memorandum re Laura Ingalls, 9 September 1941, FBI 100–34712–8; “Repeal Foes Plan Strategy for Fight,” *New York Times*, 29 September 1939, 12.

60. For a contemporary view of Ingalls see Michael Sayers and Albert Kahn, *Sabotage! The Secret War against America* (New York: Harper’s, 1942), 209.



Washington. Ingalls, quite naively, believed that she—personally—could initiate a rapprochement between the United States and Germany by using her aeronautical fame. This is what led her to contact the German minister plenipotentiary and chargé d'affaires, Hans Thomsen, to obtain travel visas to London and ultimately Berlin.<sup>61</sup>

As Ingalls continued to pursue her travel plans, an informant relayed to FBI agents that Ingalls had discussed the possibility of flying to Germany “on a good will tour to tell the German people that the Americans are not obtaining the truth.” To arrange the tour, Ingalls contacted Dr. Hans Borchers and Captain Fritz Wiedemann, both German consular officials in New York and San Francisco, respectively. The informant also related to FBI agents that Ingalls allegedly believed that “Germany is building a country [while] America is in chaos. The Germans have the best brains in the world and are the finest organizers. You will be surprised to see what they intend to do in Africa. They have scientific minds and there isn’t a lazy bone in the body of a German.”<sup>62</sup> This constituted the extent of FBI agents early monitoring of Ingalls.

During August, Ingalls moved to Washington, D.C., where her contact with German embassy officials grew closer. Ingalls made arrangements through an employee of the District of Columbia, Julia Kraus, to meet German embassy official Baron Ulrich von Gienanth in order to further her plans for a goodwill tour. Then, in September, she met him twice and on one occasion Baron Ulrich gave her a package containing propaganda pamphlets. Other than this, the content of the meetings remains unknown; nevertheless, the basis for her later prosecution under the Foreign Agents Registration Act was laid.<sup>63</sup>

Ingalls’s later trouble actually centered on her work as a traveling speaker for America First. Her problem lay in the fact that the America First Committee agreed only to pay her traveling expenses, which left her in financial straits and, without further funds, unable to continue speaking. To remedy this, Ingalls imprudently used her new contacts with the German embassy to supplement the funds she received from America First. In October 1941 she concluded an agreement with Baron Ulrich through which she would receive \$250 per month to supplement her travel expenses. It was Ingalls who came up with the dollar figure because, she said, as a flight instructor she would easily earn approximately \$300 per month.<sup>64</sup>

61. Blind memorandum re Laura Ingalls, 9 September 1941, FBI 100–34712–8.

62. Ibid.

63. Blind memorandum re Laura Ingalls, 18 December 1941, Official File 10-B, FDRL.

64. Ibid.

This led FBI officials, with no evidence other than her associations and opposition to Roosevelt's foreign policy, to suspect that Ingalls might have passed information about national defense issues to the German embassy. Hoover, therefore, ordered an investigation of Ingalls and notified the state department of the German embassy connection.<sup>65</sup> FBI agents monitored her movements but found the effort unproductive because Ingalls restricted her day-to-day activities to visiting the offices of America First. Because of the limitations of physical surveillance, FBI agents employed an illegal wiretap and illegal break-in during the Ingalls investigation. A report in her FBI file states that "*most of the information* in the possession of the Bureau has been obtained from highly confidential sources *which are not competent evidence* in the event of a trial." Wiretaps were illegal and any information obtained from one or an illegal break-in (violating Fourth Amendment rights), therefore, were inadmissible in court. Additionally, as the Brigham case illustrates, FBI agents euphemistically referred to wiretaps as "confidential sources." FBI agents either wiretapped Ingalls or obtained information about her activities from the FBI's wiretap of the German embassy. The same FBI report confirms the use of a wiretap. It reads: "information developed today indicates that Laura Ingalls has made numerous efforts to contact von Gienanth *by telephone* and has threatened to come to his home. On one occasion *he hung up the telephone during the conversation. . . .*" Knowledge of this could only have come from a wiretap.<sup>66</sup>

Upon the German declaration of war against the United States on 10 December, Baron Ulrich terminated his contact with Ingalls. Five days later, Hoover inquired with his Justice Department superiors as to whether Ingalls "should be taken into custodial detention at this time." They advised Hoover not to detain Ingalls. Hoover then submitted reports to the department's criminal division, but he was subsequently advised that sufficient evidence did not exist to link Ingalls to the German embassy in any

65. Personal and confidential letter and blind memorandum, Hoover to Berle, 9 September 1941, FBI 100-34712-8; letter, Hoover to SAC New York, 12 September 1941, FBI 100-34712-8X; letter and FBI report, Hoover to Berle, 16 September 1941, FBI 100-34712-9.

66. Memorandum, J. K. Mumford to Ladd, 10 October 1941, FBI 100-34712-20; memorandum, D. A. Flinn to Ladd, 16 December 1941, FBI 100-34712-64. Hoover might even have used information obtained from a wiretap and submitted it to the Justice Department for prosecutorial purposes, or used wiretap information in the development of criminal evidence. During the late 1940s this had happened with the Judith Coplon case, and it was deemed fruit of the poisonous tree and not admissible in court. See Theoharis, *Spying on Americans*, 100-6. Emphasis added in quotes.

criminal matter. But a breakthrough in the case was made after Ingalls's original liaison with the German embassy, Julia Kraus, confided to FBI agents that Baron Ulrich had paid Ingalls to supplement her speaking tour. FBI agents then secured telegrams sent to Ingalls from Kraus that proved receipt of money. Ingalls was then questioned about the money, the receipt of which she never denied, for which she was subsequently arrested. In the meantime, Hoover forwarded a summary of the Ingalls matter to the White House.<sup>67</sup>

Since Ingalls had accepted money from a foreign power without having registered herself as an agent of that power, the Justice Department sought to charge her with violating the Foreign Agents Registration Act. U.S. attorneys had planned to charge Ingalls in two ways: first, for failing to register as a foreign agent and, second, for conspiring with Baron Ulrich to violate the Registration Act. Wendell Berge, head of the criminal division, decided to proceed only with the first charge since it was the safest route to prosecution.<sup>68</sup>

On 23 December 1941 a federal grand jury indicted Laura Ingalls for failing to register as a paid agent of the German government. According to her prosecutors, Ingalls was a Fifth Columnist who had "used her prestige against the American people to disunite them at the paid direction of the German Government." Interestingly, Ingalls's lawyer used the FBI's rejection of her services as part of her defense. The Ingalls defense lamely claimed that after Hoover had rejected Ingalls, he had also publicly asked Americans to assist the bureau in its work (by offering information) and therefore Ingalls had decided "to engage in counterespionage work." In short, Ingalls's defense was that she had used her contacts with the Germany embassy to collect information *for* American defense as a self-styled "international Mata Hari." This particular defense did not impress either the prosecution or FBI Director Hoover, who commented: "Of all the silly clap trap this takes the prize."<sup>69</sup>

67. Memorandum, D. A. Flinn to Ladd, 16 December 1941, FBI 100-34712-64; memorandum, Ladd to Hoover, 17 December 1941, FBI 100-34712-50; memorandum, Ladd to Hoover, 18 December 1941, FBI 100-34712-6?; personal and confidential letter and blind memorandum, Hoover to Watson, 18 December 1941, Official File 10-B, FDRL.

68. Memorandum, Ladd to Hoover, 19 December 1941, FBI 100-34712-98; memorandum, M. Neil Andrews to Wendell Berge, 19 December 1941, file 146-6-162, RG 60, NARA.

69. Indictment, *United States v. Laura Ingalls*, 23 December 1941, Washington, DC, File 146-6-162, RG 60, NARA; "Miss Ingalls Gets Prison Sentence," *New York Times*, 21 February 1942, 1, 21; memorandum, Nichols to Tolson, 27 January 1942, FBI 100-34712-152; memorandum, Flinn to Kramer, 3 February 1942, FBI 100-34712-138; closing report on

Irrespective of FBI officials' view of the Ingalls defense, they were concerned when in early February 1942 they discovered that FBI agents had violated Ingalls's Fourth Amendment rights in order to gather evidence against her. Without a warrant, FBI agents had used a third party—Mrs. Ralph Revilo—who was looking after Ingalls's Los Angeles residence while she was away, to gain entrance and remove documents. The documents were determined not to be central to the Ingalls prosecution and, therefore, were not used, yet Hoover censured the Los Angeles field office for proceeding with an illegal search that senior FBI officials had not authorized. Significantly, they were not censured for using illegal tactics—the FBI had a long history of such action—but for being careless about it, which could have led to negative publicity for Hoover and possibly have destroyed the Ingalls prosecution. But with no embarrassment forthcoming, the *Ingalls* case proceeded between 9 and 13 February and, after about an hour's deliberation, a verdict of guilty was returned. Ingalls was sentenced to a jail term of between eight months and two years, of which she served twenty months.<sup>70</sup>

Following her conviction, FBI officials decided to use the *Ingalls* case as a template for possible prosecution of other America First Committee members, especially those who could be linked to Ingalls. The head of the FBI's Washington, D.C., field office informed his superiors that a warranted search of Ingalls's District of Columbia apartment produced a list of America First members, speakers, and speaking dates. The agent also relayed that the list was being retained since those on it "are believed to be proper subjects for investigation." Moreover, in the event that the bureau pursued America First, the information obtained "would be of considerable value." Hoover then ordered this information to be included in the America First Committee summary report, and it appeared when, popularly, it was believed the committee planned to reenter American politics.<sup>71</sup>

Ingalls's views of Nazi Germany and her belief she could prevent a destructive war were, to say the least, naive. She had also violated the letter of the law, as defined in the Foreign Agents Registration Act, and therefore was guilty—Ingalls eventually admitted as much though she always denied

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Laura Ingalls case, M. Neil Andrews, 16 February 1942, File 146–6–162, RG 60, NARA; "Miss Ingalls Says FBI Rejected Her," *New York Times*, 12 February 1942, 23.

70. Ibid.; "Ingalls Jury Gives Verdict of Guilty," *New York Times*, 14 February 1942.

71. Letter, SAC Washington, DC to Hoover, 11 March 1942, FBI 100–34712–175; letter, Hoover to SAC Washington, DC, 26 March 1942, FBI 100–34712–175.

that she was a “conscious” agent.<sup>72</sup> Even so, as a member and popular speaker for America First—she made over fifty speeches from the summer of 1941 until Pearl Harbor—Ingalls’s prosecution was atypical. Most America First members did not associate with German officials, let alone accept money from them. But Ingalls’s case, to FBI officials, seemed to typify the inherent nature of the America First Committee by 1942. And the case seemed to prove that Hoover’s tactics against such foreign policy critics, irrespective of illegal investigative techniques and civil liberties violations, were valid: time and again FBI agents tried to develop information to warrant prosecutions under the Registration Act, Espionage Act, sedition statutes, or other laws. Her successful prosecution, moreover, both bolstered the view of legitimate critics as somehow subversive and demonstrated clearly the evolution of the domestic security state that would see its height with the Great Sedition Trial of 1944.

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The Brigham, Barnes, and Ingalls cases illustrate the evolution of the domestic security state from an evolving political arm of the White House before Pearl Harbor to an even more aggressive and semiautonomous agency after the declaration of war. Late in 1941 FBI officials obtained authorization for a wiretap of Brigham, and by 1942—with the country at war—reauthorized the wiretap on their own authority. The fruits of this wiretap involved what one FBI official regarded as “valuable” information, which is to say, political intelligence that was subsequently shared with the administration on more than one occasion. The FBI’s effort to develop a sedition case against Barnes also reflects the bureau’s evolution by 1942. FBI agents sought to silence this prominent critic under the sedition laws during wartime, and they did so without prompting from the administration. Finally, the Ingalls case illustrates an FBI strategy sought time and again against policy critics: to link them to foreign governments and prosecute them as unregistered foreign agents. While Ingalls was something of an anomaly among legitimate anti-interventionists, her case was to be the basis for proposed subsequent prosecutions of critics. While the effort ultimately failed, it stands as a stepping-stone toward the more well-known case of 1944 involving thirty-three seditionists.

72. “Miss Ingalls Gets Prison Sentence,” *New York Times*, 21 February 1942, 1.

## CONCLUSION

A close examination of the FBI's surveillance of Charles Lindbergh; the America First Committee; Senators Burton Wheeler, Gerald Nye, and David Walsh; Congressman Hamilton Fish; those associated with the Victory Program investigation; the Brigham family; Harry Elmer Barnes; Laura Ingalls; and others confirms the underlying political nature of FBI officials' efforts. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover sought in each instance to cater to the Roosevelt administration's political and policy interests—that being to monitor the political activity of its anti-interventionist foreign policy critics and, if possible, to develop information that would discredit them. In the Ingalls case, for instance, even though FBI agents had a responsibility to investigate a true violation of the Foreign Agents Registration Act, underscoring their efforts was a desire to develop a successful prosecution of not an espionage agent but one of the president's foreign policy critics. FBI agents, moreover, went so far as to use illegal investigative techniques (wiretapping and illegal trespass) to develop information “most” of which was “not competent evidence” for trial. Further highlighting the political nature of this investigation is the fact that FBI officials did not seek a similar case against the interventionist Fight for Freedom Committee who, as Mark Lincoln Chadwin has shown, similarly violated the Foreign Agents Registration Act. The bureau's concern with the administration's political interests is further underscored in the Victory Program leak investigation where FBI officials focused exclusively on anti-interventionist critics to satisfy the desires of some high-level administration officials to hold them responsible and to discredit their arguments.

FBI surveillance efforts against the anti-interventionists were widespread, thorough, and responsive to Roosevelt's political interests. FBI agents employed the use of informers, illegal wiretaps, illegal trespass,

mail covers, official investigations; perused organizations' private files; collected derogatory intelligence; provided public opinion leaders with FBI-obtained political intelligence (using blind memoranda); likely liaised with British intelligence about the anti-interventionists; and sought to develop cases against them that would have discredited their efforts in the courts. Hoover also recommended to his superiors the use of the grand jury that, despite its work being technically secret, would invariably draw public attention through leaks to create pressure that would serve to cast doubt on the legitimacy of the president's critics.

The FBI's surveillance was not limited or "never significantly mobilized" and President Roosevelt's purposes were also not "essentially benevolent," as previous studies indicated.<sup>1</sup> Instead, they reflected an intensive FBI investigative effort and a callous disregard by Hoover and Roosevelt for his legitimate political opponents' civil liberties. More specifically, one can chart the FBI's efforts with the intensification of the foreign policy debate. During 1939 and 1940, FBI agents passively monitored anti-interventionist neutrality advocacy. During the first half of 1941 and the lend-lease debate, that surveillance markedly intensified when critics directly criticized the president's policies, including FBI efforts to develop information that had the potential to discredit Lindbergh and America First. But during the second half of 1941, when the Great Debate deadlocked, FBI agents focused on congressional anti-interventionists who were blocking Neutrality Act revision and on the AFC's financial sources. But after the declaration of war, and into 1942, FBI efforts to develop prosecutions and use of illegal investigative techniques significantly expanded. With war no longer on the horizon but a reality, the FBI reached the level of a domestic security state freely pursuing critics with less fear of backlash while few Americans dared critique government action to preserve security.

Taken as a whole, FBI surveillance during this period reveals a similar pattern of behavior that occurred during the Cold War (i.e., the use of illegal investigative techniques without approval, disseminating political intelligence to public opinion leaders, utilizing separate filing procedures to insulate the collection of sensitive information, and extensively monitoring White House critics under a security rationale). This pattern suggests that the bureau's role and functioning as an institution of the national

1. Charles F. Croog, "FBI Political Surveillance and the Isolationist-Interventionist Debate, 1939-1941," *Historian* 54 (Spring 1992): 442; Kenneth O'Reilly, "A New Deal for the FBI: The Roosevelt Administration, Crime Control, and National Security," *Journal of American History* 69 (December 1982): 639.

security state can be dated not with the onset of the Cold War but to the period of the Great Debate.

In return for satisfying various administration political interests, Hoover, an archconservative in a liberal administration, not only preserved his bureaucratic position as FBI director but also obtained over time increased authority for his bureau. When Attorney General Cummings sought to publicize the crime issue during the early New Deal to ensure passage of his crime legislation, with Hoover's enthusiastic assistance he was successful. Then, in 1934, Hoover responded to White House requests for information about the activities of fascist groups in America. By 1936, pleased with Hoover's reports, President Roosevelt stepped up FBI efforts when he verbally authorized the bureau to investigate domestic fascist and communist movements. Hoover then sought and won in 1939 an executive order establishing the FBI as the sole domestic investigative agency. After the onset of the European War, in 1940, Roosevelt further increased FBI investigative authority by secretly authorizing the use of illegal wiretaps in national defense cases. Hoover subsequently exploited this executive directive to develop a not insignificant level of investigative autonomy for his FBI when the attorney general showed disinterest in monitoring wiretap usage. Amid all of this, Hoover also developed or revised special filing procedures that ensured the confidentiality of sensitive FBI operations and information. Yet it is an important distinction that all of this occurred during a period of international crisis that resulted in a charged political debate that permitted Hoover to cater to the administration's political concerns.

An examination of the increasing number of FBI agents and the agency's annual appropriations dating from 1934 further alludes to Hoover's success in developing his FBI during this period. In 1934 the FBI employed 391 agents and a support staff of 451 and was appropriated \$2,589,500. By 1936, the year Roosevelt increased FBI investigative authority to have it focus on intelligence investigations, the bureau had nearly doubled its agents to 609 with a support staff of 971. Its 1936 appropriation was \$5,000,000. When the Great Debate began to dominate American politics by 1941, the FBI employed 1,596 agents and 2,677 support staff with a budget of \$14,743,300; and in 1942 it employed 2,987 agents and 5,000 support personnel and had a budget of \$24,965,000. To round off the increases, by the final year of the war (1945) the FBI had 4,370 agents, 7,422 support staff, and an appropriation of \$44,197,146.<sup>2</sup>

The FBI's secretive relationship with British intelligence also illustrates

2. FBI agent, staff, and appropriation figures are reprinted in Athan Theoharis et al., *The FBI: A Comprehensive Reference Guide* (Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press, 1999), 4–5.



the embryonic origins of the institutional side of the later national security state. A hallmark of the Second World War, Cold War, and War on Terrorism, the intimate intelligence relationship between the United States and Great Britain had its origins during the Great Debate. The FBI's "special relationship" with British intelligence began in 1940 and increasingly became more intimate. And while we may not be able to definitively ascertain the precise scope and nature of the FBI's relationship with British Security Coordination, both sought similar goals in regard to President Roosevelt's anti-interventionist foreign policy critics. Together, with the FBI investigative tactics discussed previously, the bureau's close liaison with foreign intelligence agencies (including the Royal Canadian Mounted Police) further suggests (strongly) that the national security state's origins can be dated to the pre-Second World War era.

Anti-interventionists suspected that FBI agents were monitoring their political activities, and while the bureau's efforts ultimately failed to discredit them, it nevertheless created a certain chilling effect. Lindbergh believed that the FBI had wiretapped his telephone and, indeed, FBI agents collected information about the aviator indirectly from an illegal wiretap and shared it with the White House and the federal prosecutor who was to question, and perhaps discredit, Lindbergh before a grand jury.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, Harry Elmer Barnes, Senator Wheeler, and Congressman Hamilton Fish all expressed concerns during the debate that civil liberties would suffer, while the America First Committee went so far as to obtain confirmation from Hoover that the FBI had in no manner collected intelligence on them through a wiretap. Yet FBI agents had, in fact, gathered "valuable" political intelligence about the group via the Brigham wiretap. FBI agents even collected information from an illegal wiretap and an illegal trespass of Laura Ingalls's apartment, and other critical comments about the administration from a wiretap on Grunewald. John T. Flynn, of the New York branch of America First, moreover, feared Hoover's FBI was akin to the Gestapo, and the anti-interventionist periodical *Uncensored* accused the FBI of monitoring legislators.<sup>4</sup>

3. Charles Lindbergh, *Wartime Journals of Charles A. Lindbergh* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1970), 515, 600; letter, Charles A. Lindbergh to Franklin D. Roosevelt, 16 July 1941, President's Personal File 1080, FDRL; "Lindbergh Seeks Roosevelt Inquiry," *New York Times*, 18 July 1941, 6; "Lindbergh Fears Loss of Liberties," *Charleston Gazette*, 4 October 1941, in FBI 100-4712-164. Historian Wayne Cole interviewed Lindbergh extensively and asked him about FBI wiretapping. Cole reports that Lindbergh did indeed believe the FBI had tapped his telephone. Letter, Wayne S. Cole to author, 12 December 1994; conversation with Wayne S. Cole, 14 July 1999, Washington, DC.

4. On anti-interventionist concerns about being monitored see Justus Doenecke, *The*

Roosevelt and senior administration officials found Hoover's reports to be valuable. After receiving the first of Hoover's political intelligence reports in 1940, Roosevelt thanked the FBI director in a personal letter. By late 1941, when the Great Debate became stalemated over neutrality revision, Roosevelt directed the attorney general to have the FBI investigate the money sources behind the America First Committee in the hopes that a grand jury probe would end the impasse. Senior administration officials also pressed for an FBI investigation of anti-interventionists in order to hold them responsible for the Victory Program leak. But most unsubtle was Interior Secretary Ickes's use of FBI information—which had been developed unbeknownst to him partly through an illegal wiretap—in his critical book manuscript on Lindbergh. Clearly, senior administration officials found Hoover's reports tantalizing and, in some instances, used this information.

This study, therefore, complements the work of historians who have examined the FBI, anti-interventionists, and the national security state. The FBI's extensive political surveillance during the Great Debate can now be understood as part of the better-known history of the FBI's political surveillance during both the Red Scare and Cold War periods. This book also adds to the work of historians of anti-interventionism who have neglected it due to a lack of documentation, research specialization, or historical focus. And while we might not be able to understand definitively how the administration might have used the information provided by Hoover, its interest is readily apparent. This study further broadens our appreciation of the national security state which has been analyzed in numerous ways. In terms of the FBI, it was the period of the Great Debate when, for the first time, the bureau *extensively* and *systematically* monitored administration critics while seeking to undermine them. The FBI's methods are strikingly similar to those employed, though on a much larger scale, during the Cold War and beyond.

In sum, the FBI surveillance of Roosevelt's anti-interventionist foreign policy critics denotes the origins of the Cold War FBI's national security apparatus. For the first time the FBI extensively monitored an administration's legitimate critics using a "domestic security" rationale while viewing them as "subversive" or "un-American" to become an intelligence arm of the White House. FBI officials, often using intrusive and illegal techniques,

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*Battle against Intervention, 1939–1941* (Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Co., 1997), 84–85; Doenecke, *Storm on the Horizon: The Challenge to American Intervention, 1939–1941* (Boston: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), 270–76.

recommended the indictment of these critics under the Smith Act, Foreign Agents Registration Act, Espionage Act, or conspiracy statutes, a tactic they would employ against domestic communists during the Cold War and eventually abandon with the advent of the COINTELPROs. These actions violated the civil liberties of law-abiding political opponents and contributed a chilling effect in important public debate over national policy. From these origins FBI Director Hoover was able to create in the FBI a more intrusive, powerful, and autonomous internal security agency during the Cold War. But while this evolution had its basis during the Great Debate, it was not a predetermined fact that the FBI would become the Cold War agency it did. Unique circumstances, such as Harry Truman's ascendancy to the presidency and Hoover's later misrepresentations of executive orders, during the Cold War era permitted Hoover to develop the FBI into a more intrusive and autonomous agency.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, Hoover could not have accomplished this without the basis laid during the Great Debate.

5. See Athan Theoharis, "The FBI's Stretching of Presidential Directives, 1936–1953," *Political Science Quarterly* 91 (Winter 1976–77): 649–72.



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